Fall 2023

Between Choice and Compulsion: An Examination and Critique of the Evolution of 'Original Sin'

Matthew James Wynn
Missouri State University, Wynn405@live.missouristate.edu

BETWEEN CHOICE AND COMPULSION: AN EXAMINATION AND CRITIQUE OF THE EVOLUTION OF 'ORIGINAL SIN'

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

Matthew Wynn

December 2023

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Languages, Cultures, and Religions

Missouri State University, December 2023

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ABSTRACT

"Why are we the way that we are?" is one of the hardest questions to answer because it requires grasping the origin of human beings. This has left philosophers and theologians in century-long debates on forming a "cosmogony of ontology" (i.e., how the origin of the universe informs the human condition). The concept, "original sin" was developed by a North African theologian named Augustine (354 – 430 CE). Augustine's reading of Genesis 3, and inaccurate translation of Romans 5:12, taught that a person is born morally culpable for a fault antecedent to their existence. This way of thinking about the world, my thesis argues, has major ethical considerations and ramifications for not just Christianity, but all influenced by it: If innate moral corruption was not our choice, then how can we be guilty of unjust acts that arise necessarily from it? The first and larger portion of the thesis analyzes the historical and philosophical development of the doctrine up until the Reformation. The smaller, latter part of my thesis concludes with an ethnographic report on the attitudes and stances of religious people towards original sin today. My findings from contemporary sermons, children's books, interviews, and popular media reveal that the belief in original sin has declined among Christians today, but is accepted by Catholics, Protestant Fundamentalists, and even secular determinists (e.g., "Atheists for Niebuhr"). My thesis is that Augustine's doctrine of original sin is exegetically unsound and in conflict with Paul's concept of sin, and that if the doctrine is not substantially revised or abolished, the possibility for moral freedom in orthodox Christianity is essentially absent.

KEYWORDS: free will, original sin, philosophy of ethics, Romans 5, Traducianism, compatibilism, sociology of religion, determinism

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Approved:

Mark Given, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

John Schmalzbauer, Ph.D., Committee Member

Leslie Baynes, Ph.D., Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their support during the course of my graduate studies. I am indebted to my family, particularly my mother for the emotional and revisory support, my friends, and my committee for their steadfast support of me and my work. I am further indebted to the religious studies faculty in the Department of Languages, Cultures, and Religions at Missouri State, all of whom provided me with constant guidance and care throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees. I would like to particularly thank Dr. Mark Given for his influence and impact on my life in more than just ideas and this project. Without his enthusiastic presence I would never have decided to get a degree in religious studies, let alone have the temerity to pursue a master's degree. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Leslie Baynes for her invaluable guidance and tireless commitment to enhancing the quality and clarity of my work. She has greatly improved my writing skills. I am also thankful for Dr. John Schmalzbauer for opening me up to the sociological importance of religion and the everyday and helping me understand the profound relevance of conducting interviews to unravel the intricate facets of contemporary lived religion.

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INTRODUCTION

I recall my mother telling the story of Adam and Eve as if it were yesterday. She would tell me the first two people to ever exist were "Adam," and "Eve." They were created perfect by God, reflecting only his image, and told to eat and name the animals. One day, however, Adam disobeyed God's orders. Upon seeing a shiny, delicious fruit hanging on the tree—the tree God told Adam not to eat from—Adam took a bite. Disobeying God's orders, thinking God was hiding something good and pure from him, God banished him from the garden, and the relationship was severed. My mother would conclude, "We can learn from Adam and Eve's mistake, and trust that what God wants for us is always better than what we think we want for ourselves." The story always stuck with me: We can avoid what Adam did, not falling prey to our own limited perspectives, but instead, with the eyes of faith, see beyond what appears right in the moment. But the story was ruined for me later in high school youth camp, for never in the story did my mom tell me because of Adam's mistake, of doubting God's instructions and eating the fruit, *my* relationship with God was already broken. Broken, not because of what I did, but because of what Adam did. My mother's story taught individual responsibility for personal mistakes; not personal mistakes pre-caused by the first man to exist. "How can one be *born* broken up with a lover?", I thought to myself at youth group. But I wasn't being taught my mother's story at high school youth group. I was being taught "original sin."

In this thesis, I embark on a multifaceted exploration of Augustine's doctrine of original sin, scrutinizing its historical evolution, its philosophical implications, and its contemporary relevance to American ethics. My central thesis asserts that this doctrine, as articulated by North African theologian Augustine, which argues that our moral shortcomings are not of our own

choosing, but rather the consequence of a primal transgression, is exegetically unsound and fundamentally at odds with the apostle Paul's conception of sin. Furthermore, it is ethically problematic, for it challenges the very notion of moral freedom, and is logically incongruent about the basis of guilt and responsibility in the face of actions that appear to arise inexorably from an innate moral corruption. Namely, if one is born already prone to choose certain sinful actions because Adam effected moral corruption in his posterity, then feeling guilty for sinful actions is ultimately a matter of choice, not responsibility.

In the first chapter, I begin with what some claim to be the roots of original sin, Genesis 3, and reevaluate the narrative through a historical-critical lens, redefining the story's meaning as told within the context of Ancient Near Eastern myths. My analysis reveals that God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, not as punishment for sin but to prevent them from attaining immortality and being deities themselves. Contrary to the notion of hereditary sin, the only inherited trait the text suggests is Eve's descendants will have a fear of snakes and experience pain in childbirth. After examining Genesis 3, I juxtapose my findings with other Second Temple Jewish literature (c. 500 BCE–70 CE). I find that while 1 Enoch presents an early sketch of Paul's later conception of sin in Romans 5, most texts during this time prioritize the concept of moral responsibility in the face of vice.

In the second chapter, I analyze the apostle Paul's (d. 64/65 CE) view of sin by analyzing the letters he wrote to the Roman and Corinthian Christ-believers. First, Paul defines "sin" as a cosmic force (sin with a capital "S," one might say) that Adam's act of disobedience fortified. "All…are under the power of sin," he writes in Romans 3:9. Sin is not, as most Christians today understand "sin" for Paul, just breaking the law or missing the mark, but rather a personified cosmic force that *influences* personal moral faults. If Adam heralds the universality of Sin, then

Jesus heralds the universality of Grace; and if Adam signals the universality of death, then Jesus signals the universality of resurrection. Death dominates humanity not merely because of Adam's primal act, but because human beings continue sinning, submitting to the rulership of Sin—hence why Paul says, "with the result that all sinned" (Rom. 5:12d). The flesh (*sarx*) of the body (*sōma*), responsible for execution and action, is surrounded by a world under the power of *Sin*. In 1 Corinthians, Paul does not claim anywhere that sinful behavior is the result of Adam, but rather the spread of death: "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). Moreover, what I refer to as Paul's "reversal theology" theorizes that all are born spiritually distant from God, so that all may choose to be spiritually attached to God; for Christ to inaugurate redemption, Adam also must inaugurate disobedience: "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Rom. 11:32).

In the third chapter, I survey the historical events and writings concerning the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius about the nature of grace and free will, and how their differing worldviews led to Augustine's creation of the doctrine of original sin. To my surprise, I discovered that both Pelagius and Augustine's interpretation of "sin" equally diluted Paul's personified concept of Sin as a cosmic force, and instead portrayed sin as an internal moral shortcoming. Furthermore, my research indicates that Augustine's vehement opposition to Pelagius's belief that souls are not inherently burdened with original sin but are created in a morally blank slate at the time of conception, was primarily driven by his concern that it denigrated the grace of Christ, through faith, to attain eternal life. Although Pelagius did not assert that humans could be sinless by their own natural powers, and Pelagius was recognized as orthodox in all three Eastern synods that discussed him, his vague definition of grace and Augustine's political influence in the African West led to the Council of Carthage (May 418)

excommunicating Pelagius. Pelagius's condemnation was made possible because, the day before, Augustine and the other African bishops asked Roman emperor Honorius to intervene and banish Pelagius from Rome for these main reasons: (1) the radical followers of Pelagius and Celestius attacked and burned the house of Constantius, a commentator on the Pauline epistles who supported Augustine's notion of original sin, (2) the followers of Pelagius and Celestius caused various disorderly riots in the streets of Rome. Additionally, Pope Zosimus was wavering, deciding whether to declare Pelagius a heretic, so the African bishops believed the emperor intervening in the conflict would push Zosimus to excommunicate Pelagius and Celestius. On April 30, 418 CE, Honorius issued a rescript to the Praetorian Prefect Palladius commanding the banishment of Pelagius, Celestius, and all their adherents, from Rome; now with the emperor raising his hand against Pelagius, the Pope's hand was forced. The very next day of Honorius's command, two hundred African bishops proclaimed in the Council of Carthage that infants be baptized to remove the stain of original sin inherited from Adam, and to escape damnation. A millennium later, Martin Luther, a former Augustinian monk (1484–1546), not only embraced Augustine's notion of inherited sin and Adamic guilt, but incorporated these ideas into his own thought, which sparked the Protestant Reformation. Tracing the evolution of original sin through the annals of Christian theology to contemporary Christianity in the West, I conclude my historical journey of how this doctrine became a cornerstone of Christian thought in the West, shaping ethical norms and theological frameworks for centuries.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I transition to an ethnographic approach. In my quest to investigate the resonance of Augustine's concept of "original sin" with contemporary perspectives, I conducted interviews with two experts: an evolutionary biologist and a behavioral psychologist. I sought insights into the origins and causes of socially unacceptable behavior, the

role of volition in transgressive actions, and whether Augustine's doctrine aligns with modern thought among religious theorists and historians. Behavioral psychologist Dr. Amber Abernathy raised concerns about Augustine's doctrine, particularly its envisioning of genetical dispositions as incompatible with free choice. On the other hand, post-graduate evolutionary biologist, Jaxon Priest, found Augustine's "hard determinism" consistent with the principles of natural selection, drawing parallels between evolution and determinism. However, even from a religious standpoint, he acknowledged moral reservations about the Augustinian framework. I then explored the debate surrounding polygenism and monogenism, examined the teachings of Catholic churches in America, and analyzed the content of non-religious children's books concerning original sin. Notably, the idea of sin as a sexually transmitted germ faces challenges in gaining acceptance in the post-Christendom West of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, elements of Augustine's doctrine, such as his concept of a prelapsarian state and sin as an ontological-moral fault, persist in the writings of both religious and non-religious Americans. While emphasizing personal responsibility and free will in discussing sin may theoretically aid the reintegration of moral accountability in American society, the term "sin" remains deeply intertwined with Augustine's doctrine. In contrast, Paul's belief that humanity is born somewhat "disobedient" and morally disordered suggests the potential for the opposite—choosing obedience under the influence of the Spirit of Christ. This aligns with the notion that God's grace and individual choice in embracing Christianity can coexist harmoniously, akin to the interplay of nature and nurture.

In conclusion, I believe Pelagius's critique aligns more closely with Paul's conception of sin than Augustine's. This is because Pelagius, like Paul, places the source of sin external to humanity, unlike Augustine, who locates the source of sin within the human being. Augustine,

believing all of humanity was “in Adam” when Adam sinned, allowed him to argue that humans are born morally guilty upon birth and worthy of damnation. However, Augustine’s conception of sin not only contradicts Paul’s conception of sin but undermines criminal law ethics employed by the federal court system of America. In common law jurisdictions, most crimes require proof of “mens rea”—that the defendant mentally intended to commit the crime accused of—to be found guilty. However, Augustine’s doctrine of original sin directly contradicts “mens rea,” for since humans can only choose evil, and are born guilty prior to any criminal act, no defendant can mentally intend to sin insofar as they were predetermined too. Far from being answered in the fifth century, the question still remains: Can we be held morally accountable for actions that seem to arise inexorably from an innate moral corruption not of our choosing? My findings both from religious scholars and from contemporary psychology and evolutionary biology reveal that the level of compulsion in human behavior under an Augustinian framework threatens the possibility of choice in decision making.

JUDAIC SOIL: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A lot of my Christian friends are surprised when I tell them that the expression "original sin" is not found within Genesis, or the entire Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament. While the word "sin" in English, which in Hebrew is, *chatta'ah* or *hat'tat*, first appears in Genesis 4:7, the word denotes "mistake," "offense," or "missing the mark," rather than an ontological or hereditary transmission of sin. In fact, Jewish theology does not believe in a "Fall" of the human race, that is, an ontological stain on the human race because of Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden.[1] Rather, the story of Genesis 3 tells us something remarkably different when situated in its original context. Before I examine Genesis 3 using the Tanakh translation by the Jewish Publication Society, however, an introduction into the dating, authorship, and surrounding historical events around the time of the composition of Genesis is necessary.

It is important to recognize that Genesis 1-11 is part of ancient mythology. In fact, it mirrors much of the epic of *Gilgamesh*, composed around the second millennium BCE. The literary style and narrative represents less a historical event than a tribal tale to account for the human condition. The literary style and descriptive tools leave the historical matters complicated and open to much scholarly debate.[2]

Scholars believe there were various traditions/schools independently involved in the composition and redaction of Genesis and the Torah as a whole—Jahwist, Elohist,

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[1] Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1-11*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: OT vol. 1, edited by Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 1.

[2] Oded Lipschits, "The History of Israel in the Biblical Period," in *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society: Tanakh Translation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2107–119.

Deuteronomist, and Priestly sources (JEPD)—which were combined into a single collection of what is now known as the Hebrew Bible ("Old Testament" for Christians). The Jahwist (J), source comprises most of Genesis 3, denoting God as *JHWH*, and characterizing God anthropomorphically, as "moving about [or walking] in the garden" (3:8) having "clothed them [Adam and Eve]" with "garments of skin" (3:21).[3] Jewish scholars date the final editing of the Jahwist source of Genesis 3 to around the end of the Babylonian Exile, c. 530 BCE.[4]

Genesis 3 is myth. The main concern of Genesis 2:4b-3:24 is God's relationship with humanity and nature.[5] When Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) people wrestled with the bigger questions of life, they would compile myths to understand meaning and existence. To be sure, the colloquial understanding of "myth" as "untrue," or "false," is antithetical to literary scholarship. Myths are stories told in order to explain, contextualize, and question the world ANE people encountered, such as why childbearing is painful, or why people are different than other animals.[6] These are some of the questions Genesis 3 addresses.

There are two creation stories in Genesis 1-3: Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-3:24. In the first creation story (1:1-2:4a), God (*Elohim*) appears more like 18th century Deists see God: transcendent, non-personal, and distant. God creates water first (1:6), dry land once water is divided, then animals (1:20-25), then man and woman simultaneously (1:27). In the second

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[3] Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis: Introductions and Annotations," in *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society: Tanakh Translation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

[4] Robert Hendel, "The Genesis of Genesis," in *The Harper Collins Study Bible: Fully Revised and Updated*, edited by Harold W. Attridge (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 3.

[5] Levenson, "Genesis: Introductions and Annotations," 7.

[6] Daniel C. Snell, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67. More babies died than survived during this time.

creation story, God (*JHWH*) appears more immanent, incarnate, and craftsman-like, creating the land first, springs and rain following, and then "form[ing] man" (2:7), the animals (2:19), and then a "woman" (Hebrew *'ishshah*; 2:23), not receiving the name "Eve" (Heb. *hawwah*; "living one") until 3:20. The Hebrew *adam*, often translated "man" in English, simply means humanity. Critical examination of these two stories demonstrates major differences. In the first story, *Elohim* is distant, aloof, and speaks things into existence rather than "forming" them. Additionally, the order of creation goes: *water, dry land, animals, and then man-woman*. In the second story, *JHWH* is close-by, hands on, and personal; he forms, makes, and plants creation. The order of creation in the second story is different than the first story: *land, springs and rain, man, animals, and then woman*. These contrasting stories reveal that reading Genesis 1-3 in a chronological, historical-scientific fashion misunderstands the thought-world and literary conventions of the ancient Near East.

The early chapters of Genesis are heavily imbued in the surrounding Mesopotamian mythology of its day. Two important ANE creation myth traditions are (a) space (distance between God and man) allows for life, which allows for some chaos, and (2) harmony vs. disharmony. The story of Adam and Eve clings to the first tradition, which in many ways resembles aspects of the Gilgamesh epic, an epic written at least a thousand years before Genesis. Gilgamesh is an ancient Babylonian text (c. 3rd century BCE) about Gilgamesh, a young, lascivious king, whose rampant fornication causes the elders of Uruk to implore the gods to send him a rival, Enkidu.[7] Enkidu protects the animals from the Urukian hunters, but Gilgamesh and the hunters trap Enkidu by introducing him to sex with a prostitute. After sex, the animals Enkidu protected cease to accept him, forcing him to learn from Gilgamesh about

[7] Snell, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, 87-91.

civilization and human practices. The two become friends during this time, but the gods order Enkidu's death. Gilgamesh is immensely grieved, both because Enkidu died, and because he realized he would also die. Gilgamesh searches for the immortal hero who survived the Mesopotamian flood. When Gilgamesh finds the hero and his wife, they inform Gilgamesh that if he wants hints for immortality, he must stay awake for *seven days*. Naturally, Gilgamesh eventually falls asleep; still, the gods give him a flower that can, at the very least, prolong life. Gilgamesh matures along his quest for immortality, and accepts his finitude. He brings the plant back to the people of Uruk instead of immediately using it for himself. However, a snake comes up and steals it from him, prohibiting Gilgamesh and his people from prolonging their life.

One can see similarities between Genesis and Gilgamesh: mortality follows failure (Gilgamesh fails to stay awake for seven days), loss relates to a snake (the snake takes away Gilgamesh's possibility of longevity), and a hero survives a Mesopotamian flood. Even the Mesopotamian flood in Gilgamesh traces back to an earlier Mesopotamian myth, *Atrahasis*, an eighteenth-century BCE Akkadian/Babylonian epic. The epic depicts a great flood sent by the gods to destroy all of human life, saving one man and his children. He was forewarned of the impending deluge by the god Enki, and instructs Atrahasis to build an ark to save him and his lineage.[8] All in all, Mesopotamian mythology, existing centuries before the final composition of Genesis, challenges a straight-forward, literal reading of Genesis 3, which neglects the broader historical and cultural concerns. For example, it neglects the similarity of literary motifs between biblical Israel and its Mesopotamian antecedents, and the incongruent literary styles and shifts between different sources compiled within Genesis at different times. Situating Genesis

[8] Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (London: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

historically is important because it enables one to understand that Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-3:24 are two *separate* stories not to be read chronologically. There is no act of disobedience by Adam or Eve in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, existence of a serpent, curse of returning to the dust (mortality), or banishment from the garden of Eden. All these events take place strictly in the second creation narrative, Genesis 2:4b-3:24, the supposed foundation of the doctrine of original sin.

Genesis 2:25-3:24: The Story of Adam and Eve

The story of sin in Genesis 3 can be divided into two parts: (1) the transgression (vv. 1-7), and (2) the punishment (vv. 8-24). The man and his wife are naked (Heb. *'arummim*) in the garden of Eden, and without shame (2:25). No mirrors exist in the Garden; they are innocent, ignorant, and blissfully unaware of social norms, or identity—they have no names. The age-old adage, "ignorance is bliss," perhaps finds its source here. They don't mind if they are seen, or judged, for who they are, or what they look like – by God, or any of the wild beasts roaming the garden. That is, until a shrewd (Heb. *'arum*) wild beast appears, "the serpent." The serpent interrogates the woman, saying, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" (3:1)[9] The key to manipulating someone is to say things true both sides agree with, but to not say things the recipient considers true, which the manipulator disagrees with. In this case, the serpent successfully manages both by asking the woman if God said something which, in fact, both know God did not. For God said to Adam earlier, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" (2:16). Subsequently, Adam likely relayed this message to the

[9] See Levenson, "Genesis," 14. Genesis does not classify the talking snake as Satan.

woman because she was not created out of Adam until Gen. 2:22. However, feminist biblical scholar Phyllis Trible, in her work "God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality," argues that *adam* in Hebrew includes both the man and the woman. *Adam* means "humankind" or "humanity" in Hebrew. So, when God divided *ha-adam* in Gen. 2:22, both Adam and Eve were created insofar as sexual differentiation was concerned. There was nothing to relay since they were both present. In other words, Adam, prior to Gen. 2:22, was an earth creature, not male or female; "woman" (*issa*; 2:22) and "man" (*is*; 2:23) were contained within the earth creature (*adam*; 2:21). Trible writes, "Their creation is simultaneous, not sequential. One does not precede the other, even though the timeline of this story introduces the woman [from the male] first (2:22)."[10]

The woman told the serpent, "We may eat of the *fruit* of the *other trees* of the garden. It is only about *fruit* of the tree in the *middle of the garden* that God said: 'You shall not eat of it *or touch it*, lest you die" (Gen. 3:2-3; emphasis added). Four main differences/additions appear in contrast to the original commandment in Gen. 2:16: (1) The woman assigns prohibition to the fruit, not the tree as a whole—an exaggerated interpretation of the command, which some rabbinic sources note neglects adherence to God's entire command and potentially opens the way for the serpent to "work his magic" (*'Avot R. Nat. A,1*).[11] (2) The woman amplifies the presence of the forbidden tree, previously an outlier, by reducing "every tree" the two can eat from to "other trees," making a minority appear as the majority.[12] (3) She locates the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden, whereas God in 2:16 does not mention the location

[10] Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 98.

[11] Levenson, "Genesis," 15.

[12] The minority becoming majority is a common psychological tendency and will be touched on later in the paper.

of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (4) She traces the start of disobedience to *touching* the *fruit*, not merely *eating* of the *tree* as in 2:16. So, why did the woman do this? Some might interpret the woman as purposefully making these renderings in an attempt to mollify the situation; after all, small compromises with the serpent may keep it at bay. Or, she is failing to recall verbatim what Adam communicated to her, a situation which appears to be more likely. However, this way of thinking is dubious, Trible notes, because "To capture her is to capture the man, for the two are bone of bone and flesh of flesh. Hence, the serpent addresses the woman with plural verb forms, regarding her as the spokesperson for the human couple."[13] Thus, Trible believes the woman exaggerates and adds words to the original command God gave in Gen. 2:16 because "Hebrew rhetoric generally avoids…slavish repetition," and to "build a fence around the Torah," not because she was not there at the time of God's command.[14]

In any case, the serpent replies to the woman, saying: "[A] You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it [B] your eyes will be opened and [C] you will be like divine beings who know good and bad" (3:4-5). Notice how none of these statements by the serpent are full lies.[15] The woman won't die if she *touches* it—picking up where she left off in 3:3—because God never said anything about touching it. When they *eat* of it in the following verses, though, reminding the woman of the original command, their eyes really are opened (3:7), and they really do know good and bad (3:7), and God knows this (3:13). Even so, the man and woman do not die immediately upon eating the fruit (3:19). At a conceptual level, the

[13] Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 108–09.

[14] Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 109–10.

[15] See Hendel, "Genesis," 9: "The exchange between the snake and the woman is a masterpiece of ambiguity and half-truths."

serpent spoke the truth, but its communication had a deceptive effect because it carried a dual interpretation. Namely, the serpent's accurate prediction of the consequences of eating from the tree was strategically employed to persuade the woman that it was acceptable to partake in the forbidden fruit. This is a fitting example of Daniel Taylor's claim that "truth can be made to function as falsehood when it is fragmented, distorted, or isolated from its position in the whole."[16] The truth of the serpent's distorted words is positioned towards God withholding Adam and Eve's ability to inherit immortality. "Then the Lord God said, 'See, the humans have become like one of us, knowing good and evil, and now they might reach out their hands and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever'—therefore the Lord God sent them forth from the garden of Eden" (Gen. 4:22-23a). Adam and Eve are banished from the garden of Eden, not as a punishment for eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but for nearly attaining god-like status when the tree of knowledge of good and evil gave them knowledge. As Jon Levenson notes, in the second creation story, it is actually "their ambition to be like God or like divine beings [that] is the root of their expulsion from Eden."[17]

When the serpent subtly suggested to Eve to eat the fruit in Gen. 3:1, she resisted the temptation. However, when the serpent told her in Gen. 3:4-5 that eating the fruit would make them like God, knowing good and evil, she chose to look at the tree, in Gen. 3:6-7:

> When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave

[16] Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 129. The serpent is also not wrong about God being jealous—a typical motif in the TNKH—or about not dying as the following outcome of enhanced knowledge since 3:22 implies that God-like status creates an opportunity for immortality from the tree of life.

[17] Levenson, "Genesis," 15.

> some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

She judged the fruit by its appearance without touching it. The cause of her temptation was sensual-perceptive: The fruit appeared nutritious (physical), pulchritudinous (aesthetic), and epistemogenic (capable of producing knowledge; intellectual), integrating a progressive process into the woman's rationale to eat the fruit. These findings are crucial, as I have heard my whole life that the reason for Eve's sin was because of pride, a quest for autonomy apart from God. But the woman and man do not attain awareness of their bodies until *after* they eat of the tree (v. 7), so how can self-seeking occur where there is no awareness of self? For they are naked in the garden, and unabashedly so (Gen. 2:25). Instead, her motivation stems from appetite and, perhaps, deception—she seeks divinity and knowledge, two things previously considered unavailable to her, and was deceived by the senses into mistrusting that what God created her for was not enough to fulfill her. Following this line of thought, the serpent did not convince her, but tricked her to look at the tree.

The man is deceived, too. When he is mentioned for the first time in the transgression scene, he accepts the fruit, perhaps believing that associating with her disobedience does not bear the same punishment as causing it. Perhaps he saw her trying it and wished to taste it for himself. Or, as Trible convincingly argues, he was with her the whole time, but remained impressively passive. Regardless, the serpent inveigles not just the woman, but the man also, who sees the fruit for what it is, and gladly enjoins the ophidian delusion. He admits to God that the fruit comes from the forbidden tree, "She gave me of the tree, and I ate" (3:12). Both are equally at fault. After they eat the fruit, they realize they are naked, and are different from the other

animals. So, they cover themselves up with fig leaves and loincloths, and hide.

The change effected by the transgression is immediate. The couple are now cognizant beings. Their eyes are opened, seeing things not seen before—such as themselves—and receive heightened knowledge, both things the serpent predicted would happen (v.5). Realizing they are naked, they furtively sew fig leaves, exposing their inner contrition. The woman and the man, at this point, have lost their innocence. Knowledge and curiosity, in Genesis, is seen more as an enemy than a friend. While today, many think what they don't know will destroy them, in this story, what Adam and Eve don't know will actually preserve them. However, being content with one's current lack of knowledge is generally accompanied by the desire to seek what one may be missing. Adam and Eve, it might be speculated, believed that there was more to be gained than God's original design for them in the beginning.

While the woman and the man are contrite prior to their reprobation in vv. 8-24, more is lost than what is renewed. Once they recognize their nudity, they hear God "moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day"—the term breezy perhaps implying that their loincloths failed to conceal their private parts—so they "hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (3:8). Again, notice God's anthropomorphic character, strolling around the garden, as if he too were bipedal, in search for the man and woman he "formed" and crafted. A game of hide-and-seek ensues: "The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (3:9). The man yells from his hiding spot and tells God he hid because he "was afraid" and "naked" (3:10). The two remain in their hiding spot, signifying their fear-trodden alienation from God (HSB, 3.8-13, 9). God interrogates them again, saying, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" (3:11) The man and the woman told themselves they were naked after they both ate of the forbidden tree, but the man gives a different answer:

"The woman that you put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (3:12). Technically, this is true, but the man falsely casts all the blame on the woman, as if he did not know it was from the forbidden tree. Still, God asks the woman "What is this you have done!" and she replies saying, "The serpent duped me, and I ate" (3:13). A more credible answer than the man. The woman was deceived (did not know what she was doing) by the serpent into thinking God's omniscience permitted her disobedience ("for God knows that when you eat of it…" Gen. 3:5), so the serpent is to blame more than the woman.[18] To illustrate this, God curses the serpent before the woman, telling the serpent it will be reviled more than any other creature, and must now crawl on its belly and eat dirt for all its days (3:15).

The reader might question why the snake is cursed to crawl on its belly when that's what snakes already do, but the writer provides an origin story of how snakes wound up on their belly in the first place, why they evoke fear among humans, and why humans and snakes are opposed to one another. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel" (3:15).[19] At one time the serpent had legs, could talk, and had camaraderie with humans, but now it must slither in the dirt, and suffer the animus of human beings.[20] God then decrees to the woman that she will experience pain during childbirth, while simultaneously desire to have sex with one's husband,

[18] The deceiver who misleads those with weak consciences into sin are more at fault than the one who commits the fault, an idea pertinent both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. See Lev. 19:14; Mt.18:6 (Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:1-2); Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 8:9, 13; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 3:7.

[19] Later identified with the devil in Wisdom 2:24; John 8:44; Rev. 12:9, and 20:2, as well as, in Christian tradition, the protoevangelium, with Mary signifying the woman and Jesus "destroy[ing] the works of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8)

[20] Levenson, "Genesis," 15.

and “he shall rule over you” (3:16). Because their disobedience resulted in the woman’s deception, and Adam never assisting her, the Lord reverses the order for punishment: the woman must now be subservient to her husband, and Adam can no longer rest and relax. The husband loses idleness, having to “toil” the “ground” (*’adamah*) until he “returns” to the “dust”: “for from it you were taken, for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (3:19). Close attention to this verse may suggest Adam was created mortal (“for from it you were taken”). Masoretic scholar Robert Hendel agrees when he writes, “Man seems to have been made mortal, but henceforth he will be conscious of his mortality, another addition to his self-knowledge.”[21] However, the story says nothing about Adam and Eve’s longevity prior to the transgression in 3:7, so it cannot be said definitively if they were mortal or immortal prior to eating the fruit. The serpent telling the woman, “You are not going to die” (v.4), is a half-truth. They do not physically or spiritually die from *touching* the tree, but spiritually die from *eating* the tree, making it the serpent’s only minor lie thus far. Now cognizant beings, Adam decides to name his wife “Eve” (“mother of all the living”; v. 20).

Immediately after Eve is named, God swaddles the two in “garments of skin” (3:21). After clothing them, the Lord is startled by the divinity and godlikeness the two have attained. “Then the Lord God said: See! The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil! Now, what if he also reaches out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life, and eats of it and lives forever?” (3:22). After the satirical snide, God “banished him [and her] from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. He drove the man out and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life” (3:23-24). Sequestered from the garden, Adam and Eve’s plight has prohibited re-entrance

[21] Hendel, “Genesis,” 10.

into the garden of Eden. Crucially, they are banished from the garden not because of their disobedience; rather, so they cannot eat the tree of life and become immortal deities themselves, since they already have the knowledge but not immortality (HSB, 3.22-24, 11).

There is simply no mention of Eve's descendants inheriting an inclination to sin or deception, only that her descendants will hate snakes. They lost their innocence, security, and carefree mentality, gaining knowledge of ethics (consequences), technology (origin of economy and culture), socio-anthropology (place of mankind), and sexuality (awareness of procreative abilities). They are presumably created mortal by God, the serpent technically never lied but used cunning half-truths, the sin was not due to pride, and they are banished for trying to be immortal and like God, not for eating the fruit. This is a radically different story than the one I was taught. In summary, then, as I suggested earlier, defenders of "original sin" within Genesis 3 can't have it both ways. Their assertion that the teaching of original sin finds its source in the first book of the Bible is contradicted by the reality that Genesis contains no idea such as the "Fall" or in a prelapsarian state where, because Adam ate of the fruit on the tree of knowledge and good and bad, it caused his posterity to sin or possess some "ontological sin."

Genesis 2-3 tries to answer the question, "Why are we like this?" but in the form of a myth-creation story. It is not arguing that the first human's sin caused an ontological alteration of them or their posterity; they are not even banished from the garden because of their disobedience. Instead, the author tells us that humans believe false truths because they are manipulated and pressured (e.g., deception via serpent); humans work to stay alive because, if not, they take things for granted (e.g., Adam left Eve alone with serpent). Women undergo extreme agony in childbirth to remind the couple that life is more than sensual pleasures (e.g., the fruit's seductive appearance caused Eve to eat the fruit), and humans experience shame and

guilt because of their ego and awareness of an introspective conscience (e.g., Adam and Eve cover themselves with fig leaves).

Sin in the Books of Enoch

1 Enoch is a collection of several smaller books written in Aramaic over several centuries by various authors.[22] If Sidnie Crawford is right that 1 Enoch and Jubilees were authoritative texts for the Qumran community, then we need to reassess the popular assumption that the Jesus movement invented a new theology of sin, independent from pre-existing Jewish sources.[23] Paul, for example, was acquainted with 1 Enoch and other Second Temple texts and they inspired his own thinking about the problem of sin in the world. For example, the existence of demons and possession by evil spirits, though in the New Testament, does not originate in the New Testament, but in 1 Enoch. Thus, it is important to examine what exactly 1 Enoch teaches regarding the cause of sin and evil spirits in the world, since it inspired Paul's own conception of sin, which subsequently inspired Augustine's conception of sin. During the centuries of Enoch's composition, many Jews readily adopted Greek language and customs, but other Jews saw it as a threat to the preservation of their faith and lifestyle.

1 Enoch is pseudepigraphic, meaning that it is "falsely attributed," in this case, under the pseudonym of Enoch, the seventh descendant of Adam mentioned briefly in Genesis 5:21-24. Enoch lived 365 years and "walked with God"—a phrase only used here and in Gen. 6:9 to

[22] Leslie, Baynes, "1 Enoch," (lecture, Missouri State University, Springfield, MO, February 14, 2022).

[23] Sidnie Crawford, *Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019).

describe Noah—until "God took him" and "he was no more" (Gen. 5:24), implying that Enoch never died but merely changed locations.[24]

Of particular interest to us is the first section of 1 Enoch, called the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36). Scholars estimate the composition of the Book of Watchers to the fourth-third century BCE.[25] In this section, divine angels ("sons of God" in Gen. 6:2), also known as the watchers because they never sleep, saw how beautiful human women were, recalling the story of Genesis 6:1-4:

> When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the *sons of God* saw that they [the women] were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, 'My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' **The *Nephilim* were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the *sons of God* went in to the daughters of men,** who bore them offspring. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown [NRSV; emphasis added].

The divine beings, or "sons of God," came down to copulate with the women on earth, giving birth to children. Gen. 6 is almost impossible to decipher as to whether the "heroes that were of old" are the offspring of the women, or the Nephilim, who are not the offspring of the women. In fact, the Book of Watchers was probably written *because* Gen. 6:1-4 was almost indecipherable. In the Book of Watchers, these children are called "great giants," not Nephilim.[26] In fact, it was

[24] George Nickelsburg, and James VanderKam*, 1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

[25] Leslie Baynes, email message to author, October 30, 2023.

[26] Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation*, 23.

these "great giants" who bore Nephilim, according to the Book of Watchers. According to Genesis 6, God then shortened human beings' years to 120 (the same age Moses died), because "every inclination of…their [humans] hearts was only evil" (6:5), and was "sorry that he made humankind" (6:6). God decided to restart his creation of humanity with a cataclysmic flood destroying all flesh except those in the ark (Noah, his family, and the animals).[27]

Because the offspring were part divine and part human when the flood destroyed them, the Book of Watchers argues only their flesh died, but their spirits did not, giving birth to what is called "demons." The Book of Watchers is the first Jewish text to mention evil spirits that do not *directly* come from God. This view was popular among Jews during that time, who interpreted the souls of the angels' children with the women as "evil spirits" responsible for evil in the world.[28]

The next earliest writing during this period that talks about the topic of sin and evil spirits comes from the *Community Rule* (1QS), considered by many scholars to be the oldest sectarian document of the Qumranite sect. It references the first creation myth of Genesis (1:1-2:4a) to explain the origin of evil and goodness: God "appointed for him [man] two spirits in which to walk until the time of His visitation: the spirits of truth and injustice" (1QS 3.21).[29] God created two spirits for humans, one of dark and the other of light. Humans are born with the ability to make evil or good decisions, and it is equally given for them to freely choose. The Qumranite

[27] It sounds convinving, at this point in the story, that a mass condemnation of humanity implies something "ontological" went wrong here. But, if that were the case, why is Noah described three verses later as "righteous" and "blameless" (6:9)?

[28] Leslie Baynes, "1 Enoch."

[29] Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2004), 101.

community preserved Enoch, so presumably they held multiple ideas about sin and evil. In the *Community Rule*, though, the "original sin" of the world is not caused by the "sons of God" marriage like Gen. 6 (1 Enoch), or the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3), but in God's creation of two spirits (one good, one bad) in Genesis 1.[30] In fact, 1QS shows Adam was seen as a hero and model for the Jewish people, not the problem: those who follow the "Spirit of Truth" will receive "the glory of Adam" (1QS 4:23). The *Damascus Document* also argues that the faithful remnant (members of the community) will receive "the glory of Adam" (5QD 3:20). *The Words of the Luminaries*, another document written by the Qumran community, shows Adam was "planted in the garden of Eden" with "intelligence and knowledge" (cf., Sir. 17), and was born mortal—"he is flesh, and to dust[…]" (4Q504 8:5).[31] The mortal Adam was a hero, not the villain.

An apocryphal work written by Judahite scribe Ben Sira in the second-century BCE, also known as *Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus*, is one of the earliest interpretations of Genesis 3 in Second Temple Judaism. Sirach was included in the Septuagint, and was the Jewish Bible for Greek-speaking Jews for the first several centuries of the common era. Since Sirach was in it, it was included in the Jewish Bible. This matters because the Greek form of Sirach influenced Paul.

Ben Sira writes, "God in the beginning created human beings and made them subject to their own free choice. If you choose, you can keep the commandments…Before everyone are life and death, whichever they choose will be given them" (Sirach 15:14-15, 17, NABRE). In Sirach, humanity has the capacity to freely choose their behavior without any pre-programmed

[30] John Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2002).

[31] Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 417.

ontological leanings toward good or evil: "Do not say, 'It was God's doing that I fell away,' for what he hates he does not do…[God] made them subject to their own free choice. If you choose, you can keep the commandments. Set before you are fire and water; to whatever you choose, stretch out your hand" (15:11, 14-16, NABRE).[32] It is one's environment, the people around them, not the genes endowed by God, that influences wicked behavior. Ben Sira is not ignorant that despair, anxiety, and fear of death befall all "children of Adam" (40:1-2), or that death, famine, ruin, and calamities come "to all creatures, human and animal, but to sinners seven times more" (40:8), but "all these [natural phenomena] were created for the wicked" and "because of them [the wicked] destruction comes" (40:10), such as the flood in Gen. 6-8. Natural disasters (earthquakes) and geophysical phenomena (fangs on vipers), exist because of the ungodly, but also to punish the ungodly (39:28-31). Just as smoking a cigarette can give someone cancer who doesn't smoke, so too, the wicked person's immoral behavior geophysically spreads to the human race, increasing environmental problems without it having been directly created by God, and simultaneously be a way to punish the wicked for their behavior. For Ben Sira, feelings of despair and anxiety, while pertinent, do not prevent one from choosing the commandments and living them out at will. Are environmental factors the only source of sin, then, for Ben Sira? On the contrary, similar to Paul's anthropology, Ben Sira locates *passion* as another source of sin. "Do not fall into the grip of your passion, lest like fire it consume your strength. It will eat your leaves and destroy your fruits…For fierce passion destroys its owner" (6:2-4a; cf. Sir. 18:30ff). Most likely referring to sexual passion, the feelings of arousal can aggravate one's reason, one's empathy and joy, and can disrupt one's sense of identity, according to Ben Sira. But doesn't this

[32] The New American Bible Revised Edition will be used in this section when citing verses in the deutero-canonical works unless otherwise noted.

contradict the book's later claim that God created human beings with the ability to choose evil or good freely, with no predisposed preference to one or the other? Passions must have been created by God, but feelings of love, justice, mercy, hospitality, happiness, and charity must also be created by God, which is why Ben Sira says humans may choose either "fire or water" (15:16).

All humans are accountable for their mistakes and wrong doings, despite the temptations of despair or passions of the flesh. In fact, commenting on the creation of human beings, Ben Sira says, "The Lord created human beings from the earth, and makes them return to the earth. A limited number of days he gave them…with knowledge and understanding he filled them; good and evil he showed them" (17:1-2, 7). This passage suggests God created humans mortal, and gave them knowledge of good and evil, not the effect of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden. There is no prior state (i.e., prelapsarian state) in which death did not exist; Sirach's illustration of God is perhaps more concerned with overpopulation than today's humans. Mortality is the Lord's decree and to reject death or to fear it is to "reject a law of the Most High" (41:4). "The first human being never finished comprehending wisdom, nor will the last succeed in fathoming her" (24:28). Adam was not created ontologically superior in a state of heightened grace for Sirach, such as Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas's idea of "original justice," but was ontologically composed just as his progeny will be. Being the first human being, however, Adam is greater than any living being, even Enoch who was created special and "taken up bodily" (49:14); "beyond that of any living being was the splendor of Adam" (49:16).

Some readers may notice that I have not accounted for Sirach 25:24—"With a woman sin had a beginning, and because of her we all die" (NABRE). This is because scholars such as Jack Levison and Teresa Ellis have noted in their works that Sirach 25:16-26 is a section devoted to lambasting women, particularly bad wives, for causing many troubles to their husbands. It has

nothing to do with Eve, the Garden, or the Genesis 3 story at all, but is more concerned with his mistrust of women, and to undermine Hellenistic presumptions of cultural superiority.[33] However, if Sir. 25:24 is referring to the story of the first sin in Gen. 3:1-6, which I believe it is, and should be interpreted literally, it would only demonstrate that Eve's sin conferred death on humanity, not that Eve's sin caused her posterity to biologically lean towards sin. Sirach clearly influenced Paul's belief in 1 Cor. 15:22 that Adam spread death to all creation, but not sin. Still, this text is later used as a proof-text for the doctrine of hereditary sin, as seen with Augustine.[34] This Augustinian interpretation of 25:24 ignores the larger context of 25:16-26, and passages such as 17:1-7 and 15:11-20, where the author supplies his own rendering of Genesis 3, rejects a prelapsarian state for Adam or Eve as the source of sin and death in the world, and affirms humans are created with the capacity to obey the commandments. In short, death is decreed by God, sin is the responsibility of every human being—not the result of a fateful event that biologically predisposed human nature to sin—because Adam is a hero and model for the Israelites.[35]

What effect does sin have on the human race, according to the book of *Jubilees* (c. 175-100)? Many copies of it have been located among the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicating its importance among some Jews in the Second Temple period. With Adam as the first among patriarchs, who apparently knew the law before it was given, the author believes observing the Jewish calendar,

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[33] Teresa Ellis, "Is Eve the 'Woman' in Sirach 25:24?" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2011): 723. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43727116; Jack Levison, "Is Eve to Blame?: A Contextual Analysis of Sirach 25:24." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 617–623. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43717056.

[34] Ellis, "Is Eve the Woman?", 723–42.

[35] John Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 20.

festivals, and the law can restore righteousness to the people of Israel. Jubilees retells the story of Genesis 3, similar to Sirach (17:1-7). According to O.S. Wintermute's translation, God kicked the couple out of the garden after Adam listened to Eve's advice to eat from the forbidden tree. "On that day…he [Adam] offered a sweet-smelling sacrifice in the morning with the rising of the sun from the day he covered his shame. On that day the mouth of all the beast and cattle and birds…was stopped from speaking because all of them used to speak with one another with one speech and one language."[36] The re-telling goes on to say that the Law demands covering of shame unlike the gentiles, and Adam and Eve dwelt to Elda for seven years (one jubilee) of celibate life before consummating the marriage and bearing a son. The effect of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden is not hereditary-universal sin, but the inability to communicate with the animals and birds as they previously could. Moreover, Adam piously offers sacrifices as he leaves the Garden, like a priest.[37]

As in Sirach, there is no concept of an original sin that began with Adam and Eve. The only change was environmental, non-communicative language with animals. The Book of the Watchers locates the fall of the angels (not "muddy" Adam and Eve) in Genesis 6, where the creation of demons results from the trapped spirits of the great giants. The *Community Rule* locates the fall of humankind in Genesis 1, to the creation of two spirits by God. The *Words of the Luminaries,* and *Damascus Document* portray Adam as born mortal, and a heroic role model. So far, the Christian doctrine of original sin is nowhere remotely close to the interpretations of the cause of sin and death in Second Temple Judaism. It is not until we get closer to the

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[36] "The Book of Jubilees," trans. by O.S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*, vol. 2, ed. James Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 59–60.

[37] Toews, *The Story of Original Sin*, 23.

emergence of the Jesus movement, in the book of *Wisdom*, that we see the Book of Watcher's idea of fallen spirits as the cause for sin in the world.

Written in Greek by an educated, Hellenized Jew, the book of *Wisdom* (or *Wisdom of Solomon*), composed somewhere between 30-70 CE (others argue for 37-41 CE) in Egypt, is an appeal to Hellenized Jews to not *fully* assimilate to Greek culture and abandon Judaism because the ethics and morale of monotheistic Judaism are philosophically superior to the religious beliefs and practices of Egyptians and Greeks.[38] At the same time, the author is deeply Hellenized and is greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, such as Plato's immortality and pre-existence of the soul (see Wis. 8:19; cf., Prv. 8:22-31), making certain passages in Wisdom appear contradictory.

The first notable difference in the book of Wisdom from other Second Temple writings is that immortality was God's intention: "God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal" (Wis. 1:13-15, NRSV; cf., Ez. 18:32; 33:11; 2 Pt. 3:9). Humanity, indeed, all of creation, is created "wholesome," i.e., without some innate defilement of the soul. It was the "ungodly," wicked people, who "by their words and deeds *summoned* death…and made a covenant with him" (1:16, emphasis added). The cause for death is not God—"Because God did not make death," (Wis. 1:13a)—but evil spirits allied with the devil. "But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are allied with him experience it" (Wis. 2:24). While people are not born infused with "original sin," death does spread to the human race because of spiritual rebellion and wickedness.

[38] Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 184.

In opposition to the view of created mortality expressed in Genesis 3,[39] Sirach, and *The Words of the Luminaries*, the author of Wisdom adopts the Greek Platonic notion of immortality of the soul.[40] Adam is referenced in chapter 10 as the "father of the world" and the first of seven heroes saved by wisdom, in contrast to his son Cain. "Wisdom [She] protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things" (Wis. 10:1-2, NRSV). More forcefully, the NRSVUE translation reads that Wisdom "delivered him from his transgression" (10:1b), so that he could exercise his God-given dominion over all the earth. When Adam sinned in the Garden, he "transgressed," but Wisdom restored and preserved him so that he would not transgress later in life. There was a fixable transgression, according to Wisdom, but not a permanent fall. This is why Wisdom 4:6 says if your parents are "unlawful," it doesn't mean you inherit such actions from them: "For children born of unlawful unions are *witnesses of evil* against their parents when God examines them" (Wis. 4:6, NRSV; emphasis added). They witness evil; the children are not themselves evil simply because their parents are. In fact, to live a life of wickedness is to no longer be human. When the wicked look back and regret their life assessment and the path they chose at an early age, they will admit, "Even so, once born, we abruptly ceased to be, and held no sign of virtue to display, but were consumed in our wickedness" (5:13, NABRE). Even if the verse suggests their birth contributed to their wickedness, the author of Wisdom believes some people are more naturally gifted than others because their soul behaved well before it entered a

[39] According to my exegesis of Genesis 3, the author believes they were created mortal, though this is debated among scholars today.

[40] See Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. David Gallop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77d: In Wis. 2:4 the same word "'scattered' by mist" in Greek is same one used in Plato's *Phaedo* when he says "'scattered' by the wind."

body, so it enters an undefiled body: “As a child I was naturally gifted, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body” (8:19-20).

The author of Wisdom adopts Plato’s pre-existence of souls to account for why his soul was born better than others without sheer chance, or luck; it was because his soul was “being good” before it entered a body. The only time when the author argues some are born evil is when commenting on the sins of the Canaanites and their child sacrifices to Molech, whom the author believed prevented the Israelites from entering the land that was theirs from the beginning of Moses (HSB, 1365, 12.3-18). Consequently, the author says in chapter 12, “But judging them little by little you [God] gave them an opportunity to repent, though you were not unaware that their origin was evil, and their wickedness inborn, and that their way of thinking would never change. For they were an accursed race from the beginning” (Wis. 12:10-11, NRSV). Because the Canaanites never repented, according to the author of Wisdom, and took the land that rightly belong to Israel (see *Jubilees* 8:8-11; 9:14-15; 10:29-34), he infers their very origin was corrupted (cf., 2 Esd. 4:30). However, that they were an “accursed race” does not mean they were cursed to be morally degenerate (see Wis. 3:12-13; Sir. 33:12; *Jubilees* 22:20-21), but refers to the curse laid upon Canaan in Gen. 9:25-27 (HSB, 1365, 12.11). The Canaanites were not predestined to sin continually, or else God would have never given them a chance to repent; they chose to offer child sacrifices to Molech. If even the Canaanites have hope, so too do those who are “foolish by nature” (13:1), i.e., are born below-average in intelligence, and are not capable of making metaphysical deductions from their observations. For example, these people, according to Wisdom’s author, will be amazed at the works and painting of artisans, but not recognize the artisans themselves. They are unable to see that the very fact of existence is logically prior to any physical cause, and that natural, contingent phenomenon had to have been

caused by something other than itself to exist. However, their limited intellect prevents them from seeing the invisible realm, the author states. "Yet these people are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For while they live among his works, they keep searching, and trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are truly beautiful" (Wis. 13:6-7). Since nature is imbued with God's presence, those who worship nature are tacitly worshipping God without realizing it. While without excuse for their mental disarray (13:8), they are not entirely guilty for their materialistic mindset since souls preexist prior to embodiment, and shapes behavior in life. Wisdom's view that the realm of God is invisible and evident in the logical procession of dependent material causes, the author follows yet again Greek philosophical thought in Plato (*Sophist* 246A-B) and Philo of Alexandria (*On Abraham*, 69).

Summary

Discussions of where evil originated emerged began with 1 Enoch. The Christian doctrine of original sin still has no evidence to support it. I have tried to mention only the texts that interpret the story of Genesis 3, or commented on the notion of sin or inherited guilt, and/or played a formative role in the worldview of Saul of Tarsus (Paul the Apostle), whose view of sin as a cosmic power which all of creation experiences is misunderstood and reinterpreted by Augustine of Hippo to form the doctrine of original sin.

As we have seen, there are various views of how sin was caused or evil originated, and later affected the human race, but one similarity in all of the Second Temple texts I have reviewed is that there is *no* notion of the hereditary transmission of sin from Adam, or that—perhaps, with the exception of the Canaanites for Wisdom and women for Sirach—people are

purposefully created with an ontological preference towards evil instead of good, or a blank slate. For the Book of Watchers, evil spirits tempt us; for *The Community Rule*, some choose the "spirit of injustice" over the spirit of truth, both created by God; for the *Damascus Document*, Adam is a hero and the glory of salvation; for *The World of the Luminaries*, Adam was created mortal, and born with understanding and knowledge. For Sirach, despite his misogyny, the disobedience in the Garden is not mentioned, and he believes all people are born mortal with knowledge of good and evil in a blank slate where one can choose; for *Jubilees*, the only change after Adam's sin was the ability to no longer communicate with animals; and for Wisdom, the pre-existence of souls accounts for why some are born more inclined to be good than others.

At best, we have seen hints of "inborn wickedness" as in Sirach with the "bad wives," and Wisdom with the Canaanites, or the hyperbolic expression of Psalm 51:7, "I was born with iniquity; with sin my mother conceived me" (*Tanakh Translation*; cf., Gen. 8:21; Job 25:4),[41] but nothing that assumes all humanity are born sinful. So far, sin is the cause of one's own doings, potentially influenced by evil spirits or the spirit of injustice, but not the direct result of the sin in the garden. With an awareness of the existing literature first century Christians were familiar with, or at the very least aware of, similarities and comparisons may be noted as for the historical inception of particular notions of original sin within Christian thinkers. While some Christian theologians claim the Old Testament lays the soil for original sin with Genesis 3, it is really Paul who supplies the roots, and Augustine who waters the soil.

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[41] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, "Psalms," In *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society: Tanakh Translation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1325: "So extreme are the psalmist's guilt feelings that he sees himself as sinful even before birth; in other words, he is, by nature, a sinful being. The idea of the inherent sinfulness of humans is rarely expressed in the [Hebrew] Bible…Christianity developed the notion of original sin."

PAULINE ROOTS

In addressing the question of how the most formative and influential writer in the history of Christianity, the Apostle Paul,[42] understood sin and its relation to the human race, researchers have considered several explanations and interpretations of his apocalyptic concept of "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45b). Jewish scholar Shaul Magid argues that while Paul was "familiar with pre- and extra-rabbinic apocryphal literature, such as 2 Baruch (54:15, 19), 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra," he "construct[ed] a notion of original sin not based solely on an interpretation of Genesis 3 but an adaptation of scattered verses in the Hebrew Bible such as Psalms 14:3, 51:5, and Job 14:4-5."[43] Catholic theologian Gary Anderson argues Paul relied on Genesis 3, rather than the golden calf episode in Exodus 32, to imply all of humanity need a redeemer, and not only Israelites.[44] Thus, he argues, Paul depicts Adam and Eve's depravity to exhibit universal salvation because they come before the Mosaic Law. Others, such as John Toews, contemporary church historian, more generally take the stance that Paul accommodates, adapts, and alludes to the Yahwist account in Gen 2.4b-3:24 of Adam's "trespass" (Rom. 5:15, 17) and his "disobedience" (5:19), to fit his own narrative in Romans and 1 Corinthians that all are under the power of sin, a cosmic external force. While these interpretations pose valuable insights, a more careful analysis of the

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[42] As stated in the cover of A.N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (New York: WW Norton, 1997), "Christianity is quite honestly nothing without Paul."

[43] John Sharpe, "The Second Adam in the Apocalypse of Moses," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (January 1973): 35, and S. Hultgren, "The Origin of Paul's Doctrine of the Two Adams in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25, no. 3 (2003): 344-57, have argued that *The Life of Adam and Eve* (*GLAE*), late rabbinic teachings, and Philo of Alexandria's works, have the greatest similarities to Paul's neo-Adamic anthropology.

[44] Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 64-67.

Greek is needed to further elucidate the concept of sin in Paul's letters to the churches of Corinth and Rome. First Corinthians will be examined first since it was written prior to Romans, around 54 CE, probably in Ephesus after Paul established a network of house churches for a year and a half in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18).[45]

Paul rhetorically construes the churches in Corinth as unholy. Some members are spiritually arrogant, believing their spiritual gifts of ecstatic speech and Greek philosophical knowledge gives them special status (chs. 12-14). They marginalize the destitute members of the gatherings (11:17-34), and are indifferent to cases of sexual immorality, such as sleeping with a stepmother (5:1). Paul's reprimands them, insisting that believers are not sinners but are "sanctified" and "called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2).[46] In fact, some of the Corinthians believed they were already experiencing salvation through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues (Gk. *glossolalia*) and the ecstatic euphoria that accompanied it, was enough for them to "feel heaven" (viz., "over-realized eschatology"). In the words of E. P. Sanders, "already were they 'kings' (1 Cor 4:8)," because of the newly received spiritual gifts.[47] The euphoric spiritual gifts, supplemented by Hellenistic influence, such as how the soul longed to escape the corporeal chains of the body, contributed to the doubt of many Corinthian believers in the resurrection. Paul writes to them, "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (15:12). This is perhaps why sexual immorality was seen as permissible for some of them, since they believed the body played no role in human salvation, only the soul. Paul, however, does not think

[45] E. P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2001), 3.

[46] Mark Given, "The End of Spirit I: Spiritual Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1-7)," (lecture, Missouri State University, Springfield, MO, April 10, 2023).

[47] Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction*, 35.

the risen Christ is just a soul or a spirit, but, keeping with his Pharisaic roots, the resurrected body is capable of "destroying every ruler and every authority and every power" (1 Cor 15:24). Rejecting the Greek dichotomy of the body and soul, the resurrected bodies will be "spiritual bodies" (Gk. *sōma pneumatikon*) untainted with flesh and blood materiality.[48] It is with this Hellenistic backdrop in mind that Paul contests the Corinthian believers' anthropology, presenting Jesus as the "second man" (v. 47), who defeats death by the power of the Spirit (*pneuma*).

1 Corinthians 15: Paul's "Reversal Theology"

Paul concludes 1 Corinthians with a peroration (chs. 15-16), a lively summation of what he believes is most important for the Corinthians to digest and "hold firmly to" (15:2). Namely, belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus for (a) faith to have any worth, (b) to be *cleansed of one's sins* ("you are still in your sins"; v.17) and (c), for life after death ("then those who have died in Christ have perished"; v.18). Crucially, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then Christians are "most to be pitied," since they live not for this world but of another (v.19). To understand where Paul locates the source of temptation and cause of sin, one must first examine Paul's understanding of death.

[48] The spirit bodies are still "physical" (e.g., Lk. 24:39: "*pneuma sarka*")—Jesus can eat in his resurrected body and is touchable; it is not merely holographic (Lk. 24:41ff; cf., Mt. 28:9). David Bentley Hart, "Our Fleshly and Our Spiritual Bodies," interview by Jesse, *Jesus and the Ancient Paths*, October 19, 2022, https://jesusandtheancientpaths.com/2022/10/19: "Spirit is in many ways something stronger, mightier, more substantial than flesh even though it can do miraculous things like enter rooms when the doors are locked, appear and disappear. Nonetheless, it's imperishable. It's indestructible. It can also do physical things like eat fish or break bread and then disappear. Again don't think like a Cartesian. Don't think it's either like: materiality means solid, inert, mechanical, dead, matter (there was no such concept) as opposed to a purely disincarnated, utterly incorporeal kind of something less than a vapor."

1 Corinthians 15:12-34 concerns the resurrection of the *dead*, and vv. 35-58 concerns the resurrection of the *body*. Key verses deserving of special attention in this chapter appear below using Fitzmyer's translation.

> [20] Now, then, Christ has been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21] For since death came through a human being, so the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being; [22] for as all die in Adam, so too in Christ all will be brought to life… [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death. [45] Thus it also stands written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit. [46] But the spiritual was not first; rather, the animated was, and thereafter the spiritual. [47] The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. [48] As was the earthly one, so too are all the earthly; and as is the heavenly one, so too are all the heavenly. [49] Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, so too shall we bear the image of the heavenly one. [56] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law [1 Cor. 15:20-22, 26, 45-49, 56; Fitzmyer translation].[49]

In trying to convince the Corinthian believers of the logic of resurrection, Paul argues: whatever has been (mortal), is proof of the opposite of what can, and will be (immortal). Jesus's resurrection reversed the death incurred by Adam because what began through a human being (death), is likewise reversed through a human being (resurrection). In other words, *because* all humans inherit mortality and physicality through man, they can also inherit, just as they inherited Adam's traits, Jesus's traits (resurrective, spiritual, heavenly), since he too was human: "For since death came through a human being, so the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being" (v. 21).[50]

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[49] Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press), 567.

[50] Maximus the Confessor, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Lars Thunberg (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 65-66:

Just as one must know what is cold to know what feels hot, Paul uses a similar logic to propose Adam and his mortality was a vital parallel to Jesus and his resurrection. For the sake of brevity, I will call this Paul's "reversal theology":[51] to know what voluntary immortality is, one must also know what involuntary mortality is; by mortality one can come to value immortality and know *what* it is. Some critics might point out we can locate immortality in our mind without having to experience it. However, some believe a level of experience is required to understand a given phenomenon fully. For example, one must first taste how sweet honey is to *fully* understand the claim, "honey is sweet." Understanding this concept, Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202 CE), in his *Against Heresies* (180 CE), uses an empirical argument to explain why Paul believes immortality and perfection was not simply granted in the beginning by God.

> For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but] as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this, being as yet an infant. And for this cause our Lord…came to us, not as He might have come, but as we were capable of beholding Him…He who was the perfect bread offered himself to us as milk… because they had the sentient faculties of the soul still feeble and undisciplined [unexperienced] in the practice of things pertaining to God…We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods…[so] that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness.[52]

"Salvation…had to be something that humanity freely chose…Only if Christ possessed a truly human and truly free will, could he engage in the relational, reciprocal process of salvation that was truly needed by mankind"; cf., Eph. 2:16ff; Heb. 2:17.

[51] Other scholars have noted a similar motif in Paul, such as Jeffrey Asher's "philosophical principal of contrariety," in "Speiretai: Paul's Anthropogenic Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44," *JBL* 120 (2001): 106, and Joseph Fitzmyer's "antithetical parallelism" in *1 Corinthians*, 594.

[52] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambault, ANF[1] (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 4.38.1-2, 4.

Irenaeus is corroborating the age-old adage, "good things take time." God created humanity imperfect so that no one can accuse God of being unjust or controlling, as it might seem God was holding something back from them. By allowing humans to progress towards godhood, God avoids any such accusations and allows individuals to work on their spiritual and moral growth at their own pace. In other words, because humans have a beginning in time, unlike God, they began as children: morally, spiritually, and intellectually innocent. Just as a baby cannot retain or consume steak despite its dense nutritious power, Adam and Eve, having come recently into existence, were as babes, and could not retain the immensity of the perfection of God. Irenaeus goes on to say that "Irrational, therefore, in every respect, are they who await not the time of increase, but ascribe to God the infirmity of their nature."[53]

While Irenaeus does not say so directly, I believe his analogy of the child not being able to consume rich meat speaks to the importance of the freedom to *experience* maturity, rather than being born mature. Being like infants, they needed to grow and experience virtue to achieve the perfection allotted by God.[54] Commenting on the same passage in Irenaeus, Orthodox philosopher John Behr writes, "a creature needs to exercise (and to fall) before being able to

[53] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, 4.38.4.

[54] By "perfection" I mean, in the Pauline sense, to always choose the good, i.e., to be a "slave to righteousness." See David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 172: "Thus Augustine could say that the consummation of freedom…would be to achieve not the liberty attributed by tradition to Adam and Eve, who were merely 'able not to sin' (*posse non peccare*), but rather the truest liberty of all, that of being entirely 'unable to sin' (*non posse peccare*)."

walk and to run; so too, a creature needs to be exercised in virtue before they can share in the uncreated life of God."[55]

Perhaps this is why Paul calls Jesus the "Last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45) and "the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor. 15:20). According to Behr, Jesus completes what was once primordial: being born *without consent*, in a world *under* the power of Sin, and dying *without a choice*, life attains balance by Jesus *voluntarily* going to his passion, *free* from submission to Sin's power, and *choosing* to die.[56] Such a reversal hallmarks the beginning of a new creation, a new covenant, for Paul, in which, rather than supplanting the old creation, the former is amplified and enriched. As he later writes to the church of Corinth, "Indeed, what was endowed with glory has come to have no glory in this respect because of the glory that surpasses it" (2 Cor. 3:10).

This is why Paul argues *a minori ad maius* in v. 46ff that what is true in a smaller case (being born of an animated body) must also be true in a larger quantity (being born of a spiritual body). For the imperishable spiritual body to come, the perishable animated body must come first, and die, just as a seed must be buried to become a plant. As Paul writes, "You fool! What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies...It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:36, 44a). As a seed enables the existence of a plant, mortality must precede

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[55] John Behr, "Life and Death in the Age of Martyrdom," in *The Role of Death in Life: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Relationship between Life and Death* (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 2016), 89.

[56] Behr, "Life and Death," 90; Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, trans. Fr. Maximos Constas. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 136 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 439: "When willingly submitting to the condemnation imposed on our passibility, he turned that very passibility into an instrument for eradicating sin and the death which is its consequence…[Jesus] converted the use of death" to condemn the very thing which affects death, sin, by becoming sin and defeating death.

immortality, in fact, it is what enables immortality. Quoting Gen. 2:7 (LXX) in 1 Cor. 15:45, he writes, "The first man, Adam, became a living being [*psyche zōsan*]; the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit [*pneuma zoōpoioun*]" (15:45). Adam became a "living being," i.e., the first human being and head of the human race. Ronald Sider, evangelical theologian, notes there is no suggestion or hint in this passage that Adam is portrayed "as a sinner"; Paul is merely saying he was the first human being created.[57] Genesis 2:7 LXX uses the words *psychēn zōsan*, lit. "living soul," whereas Jesus, a "life-giving Spirit," is composed of *pneuma* (spirit). Jesus is the "last Adam"[58] because he has introduced a new humanity in which all who, through faith, baptism (12:13), and death to the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:24), inherit the new body, just as the animated body came to all through Adam.

Some critics might feel my interpretation of Paul sounds as if God did not originally want us in Adam's body. However, the earthly body (*psychikon*) is not considered inherently wrong or a mistake, but, as Richard Horsley states, "mortal" and "child"-like (1 Cor. 2:6-3:4; 15:44-45). Or, more loosely, to "contrast between people of different levels of spiritual ability and attainment."[59] In other words, the earthly body serves as a necessary contrast to the spiritual body. Plus, while Paul does not explicitly say this, experiencing the limitations and weaknesses of the earthly body could instill a deep longing for immortality beyond the confines of the earthly

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[57] Ronald Sider, "The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection Body in I Corinthians XV. 35–54," *New Testament Studies* 21, no. 3 (1975): 434.

[58] Although, as Fitzmyer points out, the oldest MS of 1 Corinthians (P_{46}) omits *Adam*. See Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 597.

[59] Richard A. Horsley, "Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians," *Harvard Theological Review* 69, no. 3/4 (1976): 280. Philo's dualistic "heavenly" and "earthly" anthropology is analogously related to Paul's anthropology, despite Philo never using pneumatikos-psychikos terminology, thus leaving the origin of this contrast distinctive, ambiguous and unique to Paul according to majority of Pauline scholars.

body. Thus the Christian inherits as much from Jesus as they inherited from Adam. “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one” (1 Cor. 15:49, NABRE).

It is not until the last verse in 1 Cor. 15, that the word “sin” is mentioned. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (15:56). Whether this verse means sin causes death, or death causes sin, scholars disagree. However, scholars often side with Fitzmyer that sin caused death for Paul, whereas the law only gives sin a bigger spotlight. Still, the passage can only be understood in relation to Romans 5 where, for Fitzmyer, “Sin entered the world of human beings through Adam, and Death through Sin (Rom. 5:12), and they still dominate the lives of humans.”[60] Although “the law is good, just, and holy” (Rom. 7:12), it “indirectly promotes the reign of Sin (Rom. 4:15),” Fitzmyer writes.[61] Fitzmyer does not classify or explain what “law” is for Paul in this context (whether it be Mosaic law or oral commandment by God in Gen. 2:17), only referring to Romans 5:13 and 7:9-13. After all, Adam and Eve did not receive the knowledge of good and evil until *after* they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. So what does Paul mean by this? After all, if Paul says, “sin is not reckoned when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13) then is 1 Cor. 15:56 really saying sin caused death? To answer this, we must examine what Romans 5:12 means by “death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12b; NRSV).

[60] Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 607.

[61] Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 607.

Summary: 1 Corinthians 15

Paul does not claim anywhere in 1 Corinthians that any sinful behavior is the result of Adam; rather, he stresses the spread of *death*, "in Adam [*en to Adam*] all die" (15:22). Whether Paul is saying we all die *because* the first man sinned and lost his immortality, or if we all die *just as* the first man died, a causal relation between Adam's transgression and human's wrongdoing is nevertheless affirmed in Romans 5. The first man's transgression unleashed Sin as a power, causing death to all posterity. Consequently, Death, not Sin, "is the last enemy to be destroyed" (15:26), and once Death is destroyed—the *telos* of human history—the present age governed by Sin will come to an end. The emphasis on Death rather than Sin for Paul in 1 Cor. 15 is a central reason why the Orthodox Church outright rejects the doctrine of original sin. In a personal correspondence, Mark Given notes that "Orthodox theology…argues that much of the evil in the world is the consequence of the power of death. It's the bigger evil Adam unleashed on the world, bigger than sin itself. Christ's atoning for sins, then, is not 'the big thing,' but an important step in the process of defeating the real evil, death."[62]

In summary, 1 Corinthians 15 makes zero reference, inference, or contrast to Jesus and Adam as sinless/sinful (or even obedient/disobedient, perfect/transgressive). Instead, it contrasts the two humanities by mortality, not behavior: dead/resurrected, perishable/imperishable, dishonorable/glorious, weak/powerful, and animate/spiritual (vv. 43-44). Irenaeus, who lived less than a hundred years after Paul, believes there is no "fall" or "original sin" wherein humans are born perfect and descend from a higher ontological state of no return as the result of disobedience in Eden. Rather, humans are born in "unchecked boxes" so that what may be achieved and "checked-off" in life would be the result of experiencing

[62] Mark Given, email message to author, April 19, 2023.

maturity, not pre-programming. “Paradise was not to be placed in the past as something we humans had lost, but rather in the future.”[63]

The resurrected body of Jesus is immortal and imperishable; believers will also receive, in their “changed” resurrected bodies, immortality, glory, and power. Jesus is the “first fruits” of the resurrection insofar as he is ushering in a new creation, indeed a new humanity (*anthrōpos*) in which all will no longer have *flesh* (cf., 2 Cor 5:4, 17). Flesh (*sarx*), for Paul, is not the entire physical person, but the “weak” and “earthbound” aspect of the human. The flesh itself is not dualistic; it does not have a “positive” side and a “negative” side.[64] It’s just flesh, the outer impulsive self that acts as a medium for temptations from Sin, a cosmic force. Sin is not an internal germ spread to humans via sexual transmission, the position we will see in Augustine’s interpretation of Romans.[65]

Romans 5: Paul’s “Cosmic Sin” and “Original Death”

Romans 5:12-14 has been the subject of a centuries-long theological debate, and perhaps one of the biggest debates within Christianity, because the passage has been construed to mean that sin is transmitted sexually. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, the Roman Catholic

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[63] Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 379.

[64] Fitzmyer contends that Paul would have written ‘body of flesh’ (*soma sarkinon*) if he wanted to assert the “dualistic fleshly aspect of the body,” (Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 596).

[65] Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 593. Unlike the Greeks, including Socrates, Paul does not believe physical death is preferable compared to receiving the resurrection body (see 2 Cor. 5:3-4; cf. Gal. 3:27). The Spirit is the “first installment” (2 Cor. 5:5; cf., 2 Cor. 3:18) and unites the human spirit to the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, strengthening our spirit (Rom. 1:9), and weakening the power of the flesh. By weakening the believers’ flesh to *Sin*, which is the root cause of death, an ontological connection is established between Jesus and believers, evident in phrases such as “through Christ,” where Christ represents a source and conduit of power.

tradition has unanimously interpreted 5:12, per Augustine's influence, as Adam's sin creating a universal causality on the sinfulness of human individuals.[66] This doctrine went on to influence Lutheranism, Calvinism (Reformed), Methodism, and almost every other Christian denomination with few exceptions, as we will see. It was formally expressed in the Council of Trent (n. 1515 CE, DS 1514), but was first promulgated in the Sixteenth Council of Carthage in 418 CE (DS 223) and the Second Council of Orange (529 CE, DS 372).[67] Crucially, the Council of Trent used Augustine's mistranslation ("in whom") of *eph hō* in Romans 5:12 as the "definitive interpretation" of the text in establishing a "dogma of Original Sin."[68]

Ultimately, what is at stake here is that by misrepresenting what sin is for Paul, one misrepresents and misunderstands what salvation is for Paul, thus promoting a Christianity that deviates from Paul. The interpretation of Romans 5 is challenged by the work of the majority of Pauline scholars who agree that Paul "does not speak of 'original sin,' a term that as a translation of Latin betrays its western theological origin in the time of Augustine."[69] While it is true for Paul that all have sinned (3:23), it does not necessarily follow that sin is an internal toxin allowing no choice in the act of wrongdoings for unregenerated humans. Instead, Toews and Hart's research on Romans 5 and original sin, coupled with Fitzmyer's exegetical analysis of *eph*

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[66] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 403: "Men and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the 'death of a soul' (cf., Council of Trent: DS 1512)."

[67] Council of Trent, *Decretum de Peccato Originale*, in *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33rd ed., ed. H. Denzinger, and A. Schönmetzer, S.J. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965), 1515.

[68] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 408. In recognition of the error, the NABRE (Revised Catholic translation) re-translated "in whom" to "inasmuch as."

[69] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 408–9.

hō, argues that sin for Paul is "Sin" (with a capital S), a personified cosmic power that influences humanity.

I will attempt to resolve the following questions: How does Paul define "sin"? Is "death" for Paul spiritual, physical, or both? What exactly did Jesus's death and resurrection change in the nature of humanity? If one's own "sinfulness" derives from Adam's sin, then how can it be caused by free will? I will divide Paul's argument into three categories—Roman 5:12-14, 15-16, and 19ff—and will be using Fitzmyer's translation.

> [12] Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and so death spread to all human beings, *with the result that* [eph hō] all have sinned—[13] up to the time of the law sin was in the world, even though sin is not accounted when there is no law; [14] yet death held sway from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in a way similar to Adam's transgression—who is a type of the one to come. [15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died because of the trespass of one man, how much more have the grace of God and his gift overflowed to the many because of the grace of one man, Jesus Christ. [16] Moreover, the gift is not like the result of one man's sin; for judgement resulting from one trespass became condemnation, whereas the gift following upon many trespasses brought justification. [19] Just as through the obedience of one man many *were made* sinners, so through the obedience of one many will be made upright [emphasis added].[70]

As in 1 Cor. 15, Paul argues *a minori ad maius*; Christ's beneficent actions effected in the cosmos were incomparably more efficacious towards humanity than what Adam's actions effected in the cosmos. A large consensus of Pauline scholars agree with Fitzmyer that Paul

[70] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 405. Unlike the passage that came before this (5:1-11), in the one that came after (5:12-21), Paul does not use first-person plural, which gives some scholars the impression that this paragraph may be Paul incorporating an earlier writing he composed for another occasion, or an individual essay written by Paul to explain "why we are the way that we are" from a theological perspective.

defines “sin” in Romans 5 as a “personified malevolent force…hostile to God and alienating human beings from him; it strode upon the stage of human history at the time of Adam’s transgression (6:12-14; 7:7-23; 1 Cor 15:56).”[71] Or, as Toews puts it more concretely in *The Story of Original Sin*, “*Sin* as cosmic power was present in the cosmos before Adam…[But] *Sin* as power entered into history through the transgression of Adam, introducing an apocalyptic power, a cosmic anti-god figure, a ruler figure.”[72] By “apocalyptic,” Toews means an unveiling or uncovering of the power of Sin that Adam’s transgression unleashed on the world. This is perhaps the most important concept to grasp. Paul’s worldview imagines Sin as something so powerful humans could not resist even if they wanted to: “I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks are *under the power of* Sin” (Rom. 3:9). Scholars debate whether Paul's use of the verb "*hamartia*" implies only a cosmic force ("Sin") or if it encompasses both a personified force and individual wrongdoing, a viewpoint supported by Fitzmyer.[73] Adam, the first human being, would be the first to experience the power of *Sin*, but neither Genesis nor Paul explains how Sin as a power came to exist—the serpent simply existed before Adam. Rather, Paul only explains the *what* of sin.[74] Namely, what Sin does to the human race: enslave it.

With this understanding of Sin, what does Paul mean by death? In 5:12b Paul states, “and through sin death,” reiterating the story of Adam in Genesis 2-3. On a literal level, “death” here means the opposite of life (both physical and spiritual), as in Gen. 2:17 and 3:19 where Adam is

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[71] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 411.

[72] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 40–1.

[73] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 417.

[74] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 42: “Where *Sin* came from Paul never discusses, nor does he discuss how *Sin* and *Death* became linked. He…just assumes that death is the consequence of *Sin*.”

both physically and spiritually alienated from God (banished from Eden), and liable to corporeal decay. Many past interpreters, such as Albert Schweitzer and Ernst Käsemann, interpreted "death" (*thanatos*) in Rom. 5:12b as merely physical-bodily death (separation of body and soul), but Fitzmyer argues it is also a spiritual death connected with Sin, as Rom. 5:21 makes clear (cf. 2 Cor. 5:4).[75] Like Sin, Death is a personified cosmic force (8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22), an "enemy," and derives its "sting" from Sin. In other words, Death is the external representation or demonstration of the invisible force of Sin. Some may also argue it is only spiritual death Paul is speaking of here, just as Adam did not immediately physically die following his transgression but was banished (spiritually distanced) from God. Martinus de Boer, for example, argues Paul sees Death as solely spiritual; since its cosmic force is underlined much more than physical death, it is a personified power of chaos and separation.[76]

Romans 5:12c reads, "and so death spread to all human beings." The phrase, "and so" in Rom. 5:12c demonstrates a cause-and-effect relationship between the latter part of the verse (5:12c) and the initial part (5:12a-b). Namely, that Adam's experience of Sin and Death has a causal effect among human beings' death today. Because Adam died, the result of his violation to God's command, human beings also die, and death is "spread" (vb. *dierchesthai*; "pass through unto"; cf., Mk. 4:35) to them. The notion of "Original Death," as mentioned above in 1 Corinthians 15, is again evident: Adam caused the death (*hō thanatos*) of his posterity. If Fitzmyer is right that "death" for Paul is both physical and spiritual, then all human beings are born spiritually alienated from God, and mortal, because of Adam unleashing Sin in the world.

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[75] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 412; see also Rom. 6:21, 23; 7:5, 10, 13, 26; 8:2, 6.

[76] Martinus de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1988), 141–80.

This brings us to one of the most debated phrases in Romans, according to Fitzmyer's translation, "with the result that all sinned" (Rom. 5:12d). The Greek word for "sinned" here is *hēmarton*, which for Fitzmyer denotes individual sin and transgressive behavior/actions. It is clear to Fitzmyer, that Paul did not mean by "death spread to every human being," that all infants are born sinful.[77] Rather, Death is a power that influences sinful actions ("as a result"). Therefore, Adam is not the originator of sin when sin is understood as individual wrongdoings. Rather, Adam unleashes the power of Sin, carried through and manifested in Death.

The key to determining if Paul is the source of the doctrine of original sin, rests on how scholars translate the phrase *eph hō* in Romans 5:12d (see Table 1). Three main problems for interpreting and understanding the differing English translations of 5:12d are: (1) the meaning of the phrase *eph hō* ("because" or "with the result that"), (2) the meaning of "all" (*pantes*), and (3) the meaning of *hēmarton* ("sinned"). Is *eph hō* functioning as a conjunction, or a relative pronoun? Is "all" referring to every human being? Is *hēmarton* referring to the cosmic power of Sin, or transgressive actions? Answering these questions, Fitzmyer translates *eph hō* as "With the result that" (5:12d), a translation not seen in the NRSV ("because"), NABRE ("inasmuch as"), NIV ("because"), ESV ("because"), or CEB ("since"). Rendering *eph hō* as a causal conjunction raises an obvious question: If death spread because all have sinned, how can one sin before being born, since we are born mortal? Augustine resolves this issue—he does not answer a question naturally presented in Romans 5—by translating it as "in whom"—that all were "in Adam" when he sinned, thus retaining individual responsibility for death.

[77] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 413: "When *pantes*, 'all,' was taken to include infants [for Augustine], [it was] a precision that Paul did not envisage."

Table 1. Popular English Bibles on *eph hō*

English Translations of *eph hō* [78]		
Version	Abbreviation	Translation
New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	"Because"
New American Bible Revised Edition	NABRE	"Inasmuch as"
New International Version	NIV	"Because"
English Standard Version	ESV	"Because"
Common English Bible	CEB	"Since"

Fitzmyer does not translate *eph hō* as a causal conjunction, despite many modern commentators arguing otherwise due to its equivalence to the Hebrew *'al ken* and Latin *ecco perche*, both causal conjunctions.[79] His reasoning is because "there are almost no instances in early Greek literature wherein *eph hō* is used as the equivalent of the causal *dioti*."[80] Fitzmyer gives the example of the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (c. 1st century BCE), in his *Bibiliotheke historike* (19.98), where *eph hō* means "for which reason," and not the conjunction "because." The Greek historian, Appian of Alexandria (c. 95–c. 165), uses *eph hō* to denote "for which reason" (*Bellum Civile* 1.112). The Greek bishop Synesius (c. 4th century CE) translates it as "on condition that." It was not until the fifth century CE Athenian neoplatonist Damascius (c. 529 CE), in his work, *Vita Isidori*, that *eph hō* was interpreted as a conjunction.[81] Additionally,

[78] All major English translations depict eph hō as a causal conjunction to death spreading.

[79] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 414.

[80] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 415.

[81] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 415.

when Paul uses *eph hō* elsewhere, such as in Phil. 3:12, *eph hō* means "that for which." In Phil. 4:10 it means, "for whom," or, "with regard to which"; even the 2 Cor. 5:4 use of *eph hō* does not certainly mean "because."[82]

Fitzmyer's theory of *eph hō* serving as a consecutive conjunction (a cause-and-effect relationship between two clauses) for Paul is useful because it also sheds light on the complicated issue of translating "death" as physical mortality. On similar provisional grounds is the translation "to the extent that all have sinned," an interpretation that understands *eph hō* as neuter and suggests that all have sinned in *imitation* of Adam, a meaning that both Pelagius and Cyril of Alexandra used, with modern scholars such as Anders Nygren and J. Meyendorff also aligning with this meaning.[83]

Closer to Siculus and Appian's usage of *eph hō*, scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann and Heinrich Schlier, translate *eph hō* as "on the grounds of which," making death the origin of sin and the antecedent of a masc. *eph hō*, in contrast to the "because" translation.[84] Despite Fitzmyer agreeing with this translation in its rejection of the causal conjunctive usage of *eph hō*, he finds this interpretation hard to reconcile with Rom. 5:21 and 6:23, "where death is the result of sin, not its source."[85] By saying this, Fitzmyer, in a somewhat contradictory manner, upholds death as the source of sin, while simultaneously translating *eph hō* as "with the result that," an interpretation that paradoxically suggests *hēmarton* ("sinned") resulted from death. Is Paul

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[82] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 415.

[83] Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), 214–15; see also, J. Meyendorff, "Eph' ho (Rom. 5,12) in Cyril of Alexandria," *Studia Patristica* 4 (1961): 157–61.

[84] Bultmann, "Adam and Christ According to Romans 5," 153.

[85] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 414.

delineating between two different definitions of sin, with the beginning of 5:12 ascribing sin and death to Adam (Sin [*hamartia*] as cosmic power) but now death seemingly owed to human acts?[86]

The best translation of *eph hō*, according to Fitzmyer, is "with the result that" or "so that," equivalent to the consecutive conjunction *hōste*. Fitzmyer's sole argument for why he believes this is the best translation is because first-to-third century Greek writers such as Plutarch (c. 46–c. 120 CE), Aratus (c. 200 BCE), Athenaeus (c. 300 CE), Cassius Dio (164–c. 235 CE), and Diogenes Laertius (c. 200-250 CE) used it to denote either "so that," or "with the result that."[87] By this interpretation, Fitzmyer, at least partially, argues that the result of death is all sinning, but death is not the source of sin. His argument is only possible because he believes "the vb. *hēmarton* refers to personal, actual sins of individual human beings, as Pauline usage elsewhere suggests (Rom. 2:12; 3:23; 5:14…), as the context demands (vv. 16, 20), and as Greek Fathers understood it."[88] With this translation, he believes it gives human individual sins a "secondary causality or personal responsibility for death" on top of Adam's primary causality for the sinful and mortal *condition* of humanity.

An analogy that might be suitable to clarify Fitzmyer's position is living in a community where all residing there are criminals. The corrupt environment perhaps facilitates wrongdoing, so much that it may make others participate in crime. However, it would not mean that the

[86] Bultmann, "Adam," 153: "Since in this context the only thing that matters is that Adam brought death into the world, the supporting sentence 'because all sinned' is actually superfluous (in itself the *eph' ho* could as well be masculine as neuter: 'on the basis of this')…Yes, the sentence even causes a dilemma; for while in verse 12 the responsibility for sin and death falls upon Adam, now the responsibility is ascribed to sinning men."

[87] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 416.

[88] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 417.

criminals cause the other people to do wrong *ipso facto* but is a motivating cause alongside the individual decision leading to misconduct. Similarly, Sin as cosmic power was introduced to humanity through Adam and his transgression, and affected his posterity, causing others to sin in a way similar to Adam's (5:14). Whether this is what Fitzmyer actually means, he does not explicitly say, only clarifying that personal responsibility is a secondary cause for death entering the world, and Adam's sin is the primary cause of creating sinners and bringing death into the world.

Fitzmyer overlooks what I consider a critical point about Paul's "reversal theology." Assuming Fitzmyer is correct that the result of death is all committing personal sins (*hēmarton*) contra to the "because" translation, could Paul, in fact, be employing a reversal rhetoric here? In 1 Cor. 15:21, 42-49, Paul argues Adam's sin was the source of his death (spiritual exile) and now, in Romans 5:12, death (alienation) is the source of sin (personal act)? Although I concede that Paul's application of double-meanings to the terms death and sin is a far-fetched proposal, the legitimacy of Paul using double-meanings does not interfere with my central argument. Paul is making use of a chiasm—a *reversal* of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses—in Romans 5:12d. In fact, contemporary philosopher of religion, David Bentley Hart, in his translation of the Greek New Testament, contends that Paul in Rom. 5:12 is arguing in a chiastic form. So, Rom. 5:12 would read as, "Just as sin entered the cosmos and introduced death into all its members, so the contagion of death spread into the whole of humanity and introduced sin into all its members."[89] Or, to use Hart's literal translation of 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin entered into the cosmos through one man, and death through sin, so also death pervaded all

[89] David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 268.

humanity, whereupon all sinned."[90] Not only does Hart recognize Paul's cosmic conception of Sin (*hamartia*), he translates *eph hō* as "whereupon," a translation similar to Fitzmyer's in its acceptance of "death" in 5:12d preceding *hēmarton*, but subsequent to *hamartia* in 5:12a. Hart argues that it is a chiasm because the pronoun *hō* is dative masculine, and as such "refers back to the most immediate prior masculine noun, which in this case is *thanatos*, 'death,' and would be taken to mean, correctly, I believe, that the consequence of death spreading to all human beings is that all became sinners."[91] Not only does Hart's argument explain Paul's emphasis on the defeat of death in 1 Cor. 15, rather than Sin, but it also explains that *eph hō*, in relation to *hēmarton* ("sinned" for Hart) is referring to death (*thanatos*), not Adam—as "in whom" suggests—while still retaining Paul's use of Sin as cosmic power present before the death of Adam.

To clarify, recall the beginning of the passage: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and so death spread to all human beings, *with the result that* [eph hō] all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The passage begins formulating a "just as" argument (5:12a), which implies a logical procession. In this way, Romans 5:12 reads, "Just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], leading to his death, so too death spread to all human beings, leading to their sin." This reverses the effect of Adam (death), and transfers it to his posterity, where his posterity die first, and then sin after. Hart and Toews agree that this passage reverses the order of sin and death between Adam and his progeny; Fitzmyer, however, doubts the legitimacy of a chiasm. Rather, he argues 5:12a is an anacoluthon, a syntactical upending of a

[90] Hart, *New Testament*, 253.

[91] Hart, *New Testament*, 268.

sentence, since Paul does not use "so too" (*houtōs kai*) as he does in vv. 18-19.[92] Is Paul not using "so too" in vv. 18-19 enough to disprove Hart's argument that since the pronoun *hō* (in *eph hō*) is dative masculine, it refers back to the most immediate prior masculine noun, which is *thanatos* ("death"), meaning the consequence of death spreading to all human beings is that all became sinners? I don't believe so.

In either case, both Fitzmyer and Hart agree Romans 5:12 is not saying all have sinned "because of" the first man, but that mankind entering the cosmos brings death, and along with it, Sin. Adam succumbed to Sin, leading to his death; his death spread, leading to our sin. Thus, Paul can say in Rom. 5:21 and 6:23, without contradicting himself, that sin is the wages of death and sin exercised dominion in death. Sin is not something one does, but rather it does something to the person: subjects them to death. Here is my proposed structure of how Romans 5:12 should be read, influenced by Hart's rendering:

> (Adam): Sin entered the cosmos – it introduced death – death spread to all humanity – it introduced sin to all humanity.
>
> (Jesus): Righteousness entered the cosmos – it introduced eternal life – eternal life spread to all humanity – it introduced righteousness to all humanity.

Romans 5:13 reads: "up to the time of the law sin was in the world, even though sin is not accounted where there is no law." Paul is saying that before there was a law, there was sin; rather, he is saying sin cannot be accounted where there is no law. Many scholars agree with

[92] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 411. However, he admits that many scholars find *kai houtōs* as acceptable for designating "so too": "which Cerfaux (*Christ*, 231–32), Barrett (*Romans*, 109), Kirby ("The Syntax"), and Scroggs (*Last Adam*, 79-80) have tried to take at its equivalent."

Fitzmyer that the "law" (*nomos*) here refers to the Mosaic law.[93] In other words, Sin existed prior to the law because Sin is not a moral wrongdoing but a power; hence, those who transgressed were not charged against it prior to the Law.

Though the period between Adam and Moses did not reckon transgressions since there was no law, "death [still] held sway from Adam until Moses even over those who had not sinned a way similar to Adam's transgression, who is a type of the one to come" (5:14). Therefore, Paul makes it clear, as he did in 1 Cor. 15, the universal reign of death exists prior to, or regardless of, personal transgressions. Or, as Hart puts it more daringly, in v. 15 "Paul makes it clear that the universal reign of death takes place in both those who have sinned and those who have not."[94] Sin as power (*hamartia*) still exists, and reigns universally, but only to those who respond to it. Paul calls Adam's failure a transgression (*parabaseōs*), not a sin (*hamartia*), such as in 5:14b, distinguishing individual wrongdoing from Sin as power.

In the last part of 5:14, Adam is portrayed as a "type" (*typos*) of the one to come. This verse can only be understood in context with the following verse. "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many have died because of the trespass of one man, how much more have the grace of God and his gift overflowed to the many because of the grace of one man, Jesus Christ?" (5:15). Adam foreshadows the future Adam, i.e., Christ, the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), and is a "pattern" or "model" in the sense that Adam's trespass and death proves the existence of its opposite: free gift and grace. Namely, by all sharing in the effects of Adam's trespass by mortality, God's favor of grace demonstrated through Christ becomes seen not as an imbued inheritance, but a "free gift" of reconciliation. This is why Paul says, "the gift is not like the

[93] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 417.

[94] Hart, *The New Testament*, 269.

trespass" (v.15) because there is a difference in Christ and Adam's actions, but similarity in their universal effects: just as Adam was the mediator of death, so Jesus is the mediator of grace; Adam brought Sin into the cosmos through an unrighteous act, so Christ brought Grace into the cosmos through a righteous act.

Paul can admit differences between Jesus and Adam—"But the gift is not like the result of one man's sin" (5:16)—but simultaneously present them as similar in their effects on humanity. Adam's trespass brought judgment which became condemnation, so Jesus's gift followed people's trespasses which became justification (5:16b-c). Paul's argument is nearly cyclical, or at least a metaphysical defense for the existence of a new humanity, without pronouncing the first *anthropos* as a divine mistake or demiurgic creation. Sin led to condemnation (Gen 2:17), now death leads to sin, so Jesus defeats death to overcome sin. Paul reiterates in the following verses: "If by the trespass of one man death came to hold sway through that one man, how much more will those who receive the abundance of God's grace and his gift of uprightness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. So, just as through one trespass condemnation [death] came upon all, through one act of uprightness justification and life came to all human beings" (5:17-18).

"Just as through the disobedience of one man [the] many were made sinners [*hamartoloi*], so through the obedience of one [the] many will be made upright" (Rom. 5:19).[95] The greatest possible support for the doctrine of original sin probably comes from the first part of this verse. Even for Fitzmyer, this verse proves "humans have in themselves the effects of

[95] David Bentley Hart notes that including the definite article, "the," prior to "one" and "many" is necessary translation to enunciate its universal, absolutizing effect (*New Testament*, pg. 269).

Adamic sin," which includes "personal sinful acts."[96] Fitzmyer includes personal sinful acts in the word "sinners" (*hamartoloi*) (5:19), rather than what Paul really means by Sin here (Gk. singular)—a cosmic external power released through Adam's transgression. Thus, Fitzmyer can uphold a compatibilist doctrine (individual responsibility and freedom in a deterministic universe) of original sin by claiming that sinful conduct is not only a result of free will, but also predetermined by Adam.

While Fitzmyer is correct that 5:19a proves Adam's disobedience affected his posterity as "sinners," by "sinners" Paul does not mean, as John Toews and Vincent Taylor point out, unrighteous or unjust behavior, or breaking the law or missing the mark, as most Christians today understand "sin" for Paul. Rather, Paul conceptualizes Sin as a cosmic force-field that Adam's act of disobedience fortified.[97] Paul also does not mean humans have inherited depravity or a tendency to perform sinful act/deeds, as Augustine argues. Rather, Sin as power causes personal sin (*hēmarton*) (5:12d). Adam catalyzed the ripple of Sin in the world but did not himself cause future individual transgressive actions; if he did, then any action that proceeds from an individual is determined from the first man. Rather, in the words of Toews, "What entered the world with Adam's *transgression* was not 'transgression,' but Sin. Universal sinfulness was not 'personal sin.'"[98]

The last two verses, Rom. 5:20-21, discusses the role of the law in advancing knowledge of sin and its purpose leading up to the Christ event. "The law slipped in that trespass might

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[96] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 421, 446.

[97] Vincent Taylor, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Epworth Press, 1955).

[98] Toews, *Romans*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, ed. Elmer Martens and Willard Smartley (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007), 157.

increase; but where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin held sway in death, grace too might reign through uprightness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:20-21). Saying the law "slipped in" might make Paul appear antinomian, but it is important to understand Paul's full perspective in his elaboration of the law. The law is God's revelation for Paul and is a gift to help make sin evident. The fact that trespasses increased through the Mosaic law was a result of its ability to expose human sinfulness for what it really is—"in order that [sin] might become sinful beyond measure" (7:13). But for Paul, it failed to overcome what it exposed. Namely, Sin as power. The law makes sin evident, but it is powerless to do anything about it. In attempting to advance righteousness, by means of supplying humans with a "knowledge of sin" (3:20; cf., 7:13), *nomos* inadvertently increased sin in the world. However, by doing so, through Christ, "Grace" (*charis*) has abounded all the more (5:20), making God's Grace more powerful and "greater than Sin."[99]

Even though running creates an opportunity for injury, injury does not make running bad simply because it increases the likelihood of injury; in fact, running is a high reward exercise precisely because it involves risk. Similarly, the Mosaic law, though good in itself, did not bring death, but what the commandments revealed, did. Sin "held sway" in death, i.e., exerted its influence through the medium of death, so that Grace, the opposite of Sin, would reign through uprightness, the opposite of death. Thus, Paul concludes chapter five with the antitypic effects brought through Christ. Grace, a "personal force ruling over human beings," coupled with "eternal life," has replaced, indeed *reversed*, the Sin and Death incurred by Adam. Contrary to the doctrine of original sin, which posits sin as an escapable characteristic of humanity, Paul

[99] Toews, *Romans*, 161.

believes Sin is a cosmic force now conquered by the resurrected Jesus creating a new humanity through the gift of the Spirit.

In conclusion, Paul's pivotal point is that the Grace and life of Christ overrule the Sin and Death of Adam; all four of these universal principles are represented as cosmic rulers. The validity of whether 5:12d is a chiasm, as Hart contends, does not compromise my main argument: Paul does not believe Adam caused all humanity to behave sinfully without personal responsibility, because Paul defines Sin as power, not an action. Crucially, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23) *because* "all…are under the power of Sin" (3:9), not because Adam ontologically tainted the souls of his posterity to behave sinfully, nor because every human is culpable of a fault antecedent to their existence, but because all submitted to the cosmic rule of Sin which Adam invigorated and spread through death.

Paul's Anthropology in Romans

We just learned how sinfulness is not an internal germ for Paul, but a transpersonal reception (all people respond) to the perennial power of Sin. But how does this occur? According to Mark Given, Paul's reason for why we "sin" is not because "we're genetically or biologically flawed," but because we are "fleshly, and being challenged by malevolent spiritual powers for which we're no match."[100] Given makes an essential point for Paul. Close examination of Paul's corpus reveals the main conduit for sinful behavior is the "flesh" (*sarx*). To demonstrate, there are only two places Paul writes a list of "sinful" actions that debar people from "inheriting the Kingdom of God"—1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and a Galatians 5:19-21. When he lists these bad

[100] Given, email message to author, May 24, 2023.

actions/traits (e.g., "licentiousness," "idolatry," "drunkenness"), he calls them "unjust" in 1 Cor. 6 but labels them "*works of the flesh*" in Galatians 5. He does not call them "sins."

However, because the word "flesh" is ambiguous, sounding almost like Paul is saying flesh is "the sinful self" of the human being, as the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr propounds, many Christians today resort to saying "sin" instead of "works of the flesh."[101] Proponents of Rohr's view are right to argue that Paul sometimes uses "flesh" as the equivalent of "body"—and thus "self," as in 1 Cor. 6:16 and 2 Cor. 4:10-11. However, the "body" (*soma*) for Paul is simply the self; you don't have a body, you are a body (Phil. 1:20; Rom. 6:12-13).[102] Moreover, when Paul says "do not live according to the flesh" in Romans 8:12, how would human beings live at all if by "flesh" he means the total human?[103] Instead, "more frequently," Fitzmyer insists, "flesh denotes the human being as material, earthbound, and weak, the human creature left to itself (1 Cor. 1:29)," similar to Given's view.[104] David Bentley Hart's classification of the flesh as the "outer man," is another lucid way of explaining it.[105] Nevertheless, critics of this view are right to point out that flesh (*sarx*) is interconnected and inseparable from the animated body for Paul. However, they overlook the reason why the new spiritual (*pneumatikos*) body *that* Christ foreshadows is less pervious to the power of Sin than the animated (*psychikos*) body of Adam:

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[101] Richard Rohr, "Flesh and Spirit," Daily Meditations, Center for Action and Contemplation, April 10, 2015, https://cac.org/daily-meditations/flesh-and-spirit-2015-04-10/.

[102] Birger Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), 8-9; see also Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 593.

[103] Paul *never* says, "life according to the body" (*kata soma*), but "life according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*) (see 2 Cor. 5:16; cf., Rom. 8:5).

[104] Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 593.

[105] Hart, "Our Fleshly and Our Spiritual Bodies," interview by Jesse.

because it is *without flesh*. As Paul writes, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). This is why Paul argues, leading up to 1 Cor. 15:50 in vv. 35-38, that a seed (i.e., Adam's body) changes its composition, somewhat similar to a change of clothes (2 Cor. 5); just as the death of the first humanity of Adam produced a new "body" in Christ. So, how does all of this relate to original sin?

The reason "flesh" relates to sin is that, if I am correct that Paul understands (a) Sin as a perennial, external power, and (b) the flesh as non-reducible to the entire human self, then it is perfectly logical for Paul to believe that Christians are both "dead to" and "freed from sin" (Rom. 6:7, 11), "slaves to righteousness" (Rom. 6:18), and yet also that "all have sinned" and "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23b). For Sin is in the world, receptive to the flesh, not ineluctably inside the human out of which bad actions proceed.[106] The Christian can be free from submitting to Sin's rule, yet simultaneously under the power of Sin, because Sin is an external power in the world. It is not internally contained in, or restrained to, the human soul. Christians remain susceptible to the power and influence of Sin, but they are not "under the power of Sin" (Rom. 3:9). They've been liberated. In this way, the Augustinian claim that sin remains a stronghold in the Christian life because it is inherited biologically, is refuted. All have sinned because all live in a world where the power of Sin reigns. When someone becomes a Christian, Sin of the cosmos does not magically vanish, since it is not individually contained, but the power of the Spirit controls the flesh which in turn loosens the stronghold Sin has over those in the world.

[106] When Paul says "sin…dwells within me" (Rom. 7:17; cf. 7:23), he clarifies in the following verse, "dwell within me, that is, *in my flesh*" (Rom. 7:18; emphasis added).

A better term for clarification is the "I" (*Egō*), the word Paul actually uses in Romans 7:14-24. This passage is often considered *prosopopoeia* (speech in character) because the apostle Paul personifies the internal struggle and conflict experienced by an individual trying to live a righteous life *under the law*, not by the Spirit of Christ. In a dramatized battle between Paul's struggle to accomplish the will of God and his desire to fulfill it, he writes, "nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh [*sarx*]" (7:18), but "I [*egō*] delight in the law of God in my inmost self [*eso anthropos*]" (7:22). Because Sin is an external force, it interacts with the external flesh ("outer man") of the unregenerated human being, and torments the one who delights in God in the inmost self. However, because the person who strives to be good cannot overcome the sinful flesh, an internal conflict arises. In other words, a person truly "desires" and "wants" to fulfill God's law, but because desire is not the same as execution—the "I" *desires* good, but is dominated by the force of Sin through the flesh—the natural instinctive affects of the flesh make it difficult to enact what the "I" knows to be true without the individual spirit enjoined with God's Spirit.[107] As Paul writes, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). To be sure, Paul "doesn't have any concept of the spirit within us as being in some sense separate from the divine spirit."[108] Therefore, to dislike the Gnostics for believing there is an inherent divinity in human beings, or to abominate Pelagius for claiming that "our souls possess what might be called a sort of natural integrity which presides in the

[107] Emma Wasserman, "The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Revisiting Paul's Anthropology in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 4 (2007): 793–816. https://doi.org/10.2307/27638469.

[108] David Bentley Hart, "Our Fleshly and Our Spiritual Bodies," interview by Jesse.

depths of the soul and passes judgements of good and evil,"[109] is to reject Paul's claim that, "Gentiles, who do not possess the law, by nature do what the law requires…show[s] that what the law requires is written on their hearts, as their own conscience [*syneidēsis*] also bears witness" (Rom. 2:14-15).

The human mind, though potentially open to the influence of God's Spirit, is subdued by the passions and desires of the flesh (Rom. 7:5; 13:14).[110] If Romans 7:14-24 is a mock speech of an unregenerated person, there is an innate *desire* within the minds of human beings that "delights in the law of God" (7:22). However, the flesh (*sarx*) of the carnal body (*soma*)—the carnal body responsible for execution and action—is surrounded by a world under the power of *Sin* that human society and politics, inspired by groupthink, only exacerbates. Consequently, a divide between flesh and spirit, of action and desire/will, exists within the human self (*sōma*) (8:4–9, 13). Without a faithful openness to God's Spirit, revealed in Jesus Christ, human individuals do not accomplish good, not because of "indwelling sin," but because of flesh. The outer man is influenced by Sin as power, subsequently influencing the body to do what the inward man does not truly desire.[111] When Paul says, "sin that dwells within me," in Rom. 7:20, by "me" he is referring to the flesh. Explained two verses earlier, Paul states, "Good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh" (Rom. 7:18). This is different than Augustine's conception, and Pelagius's conception, because both understood Sin as something innate that corresponds to self-action, rather than something cosmic that influences the flesh towards action. Moreover, this also

[109] Pelagius, "Letter to Demetrias," in *Theological Anthropology*, ed. J. Burns (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), 44.

[110] The heart (2:29; 5:5; 10:9-10), mind (1:20; 7:23, 7:25), and conscience (13:5) are open to God's influence but are also capable of the opposite.

[111] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 128.

means that humans are not born inherently sinful, but are born into a world that is dominated by the powerful Sin of confusion and deception, unleashed by the serpent ("god of this age," 2 Cor. 4:4) who personifies evil forces.[112]

The transformation is not merely in the future, though. Because Christ took on flesh and did not submit to Sin as a power, but defeated death, Christians now have, through the "life-giving Spirit" of Christ (1 Cor. 15:45), put to death the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:24). The Spirit cleanses the Christian "from every defilement of body and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). As C. E. B. Cranfield writes, "Christians lost the very means of sinning…one has been freed of the fleshly, sin-prone body," in this life.[113] Their true nature is free.

Summary

Most Paul scholars agree with John Toews's view that sin for Paul is not an individual or internal germ, some defiling specimen within the human body that incites immoral behavior. Rather, sin is a cosmic power (*Sin*) present before Adam was created—taking Enochic influence—but was galvanized, or activated, by Adam's transgression, providing Sin a mode of influence on the creation. Romans 5 contains two main antitheses for understanding Paul's history of Sin and redemption: (1) Adam brought Sin into the cosmos through an unrighteous act; so too Christ brought Grace into the cosmos through a righteous act (5:15-17); (2) Adam's trespass led to condemnation and death for all men; so too does Christ's act of righteousness lead

[112] The influence of 1 Enoch's "evil spirits" conception is evident in Paul; see 2 Cor. 11:3, 20; 2:11; 12:7b, 16-17.

[113] C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: Volume 1: 1-8* (Kiribati: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 310–11; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 437.

to acquittal and life for all men (5:18-19). Paul affirms both universality and individual responsibility of Sin. Sin is universal—it is a cosmic power—but salvation is universal; it is greater than Sin and reverses the consequences. But sin is also personal—"because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12d)—so salvation is also personal—"all who receive" (v. 17).[114]

My conclusion, then, is that Adam is not the "originator" of Sin, as much as the "activator" of Sin as cosmic power in human history. Sin as power abides in the cosmos; when Adam died, Sin still reigned. Paul does not provide a precise account of Sin's origin in the cosmos or its hereditary nature. At the very least, Paul is aware that human sinfulness is not owed to Adam alone. The effects Adam's sin had on creation were cosmic, not merely individual. The main point for Paul is that if Adam activates the universality of Sin, then Jesus activates the universality of Grace; and if Adam activates the universality of Death, then Jesus activates the universality of resurrection. Death dominates humanity not merely because of Adam's primal act, but because human beings continue the practice of acting sinfully, submitting to the rulership of Sin—hence why Paul says "with the result that all sinned" or "whereupon all sinned" (Rom. 5:12d).[115] Moreover, my "reversal theology" theorizes that all are born spiritually distant from God so that all may choose to be spiritually attached to God; for Christ to be, Adam also must be. "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Rom. 11:32), Paul says.

It was not until the fourth-century CE with a Christian theologian named Augustine, that the phrase, "the Fall," "original sin," or "prelapsarian state" became standardized to explain Romans 5 in relation to Genesis 3. It was borne out of a riposte to another Christian's teaching,

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[114] Toews, *Romans*, 163.

[115] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 412; Toews, *Romans*, 157.

named Pelagius, who argued Adam's sin merely presented a bad example to humanity, rather than make all born in sin. To counter Pelagius's moral argument, Augustine introduced the idea of transmission of sin by propagation, or heredity (called "Traducianism"). Once Augustine's idea of hereditary sin was planted, "the story of Genesis 3 about Adam's sin was reinterpreted in terms of 'the Fall'; Adam fell from grace, a supernatural status."[116] When I was a kid being taught original sin in youth group, the doctrine was actually grounded in the early fifth century of Latin (western) church teaching, not Paul's. Augustine's interpretation of Paul's writings, not Paul himself, and his understanding of inherited sin from Adam and the need for baptism, is what established the concept of original sin as a central doctrine to the Christian faith.

[116] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 409.

AUGUSTINE VS. PELAGIUS

In the fifth century CE, a controversy emerged between a Romano-British monk, Pelagius (ca. 350–425 CE), and a prominent bishop from North Africa, Aurelius Augustine (354–430 CE).[117] The controversy was both a theological and philosophical dispute focused on human nature, free will, and grace. Eventually, due to Augustine's influence in the political and theological spheres in Africa, Pelagius was condemned in 418 CE in the Council of Carthage for asserting that Adam's sin influences later generations to habitually imitate him, and not that sin is sexually transmitted and that unbaptized babies go to hell. Pelagius's excommunication led to Augustine creating a doctrine in which all humanity participated in the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Their sin was transmitted to their posterity through sexual intercourse (Latin: *tradux peccati*). Now, all newborns must be baptized to remove the stain and escape damnation.[118] The Latin authorities that adjudicated the condemnation of Pelagius destroyed and/or suppressed most of his writings. Hence, Pelagius's story is coloured through the lens of an Augustinian narrative. In the twentieth century, scholars such as John Ferguson and Gerald Bonner sought to paint a more accurate picture of the development of original sin; a picture much different than the one Western Christians have typically heard.

[117] James Albert Harrill, "How the West Got Paul Wrong," in *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 138–144.

[118] Burkhard Steinberg, "Rehabilitating Pelagius: Another Look at Original Sin," in *Theology* 108, no. 841 (2005): 19, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X0510800103.

Historical Background

When Emperor Galerius reigned from 305–311 CE, he legalized Christianity and gave it the status of *religio licita* in the Edict of Serdica (311 CE) to reduce Roman persecution.[119] Nevertheless, between 313 and 410 CE, Persian armies were, bit-by-bit, capturing provinces, several fortresses of the empire, and other nations to the north were also declaring war. To secure internal political control and strengthen the defense of the empire until 410 CE, Constantine actively sought to unify the empire by solving divisive doctrinal disputes.[120] So, in 325 CE, Constantine ordered a council at Nicaea.[121]

Like the Empire, the Church was factious and diverse. Other religious movements such as Neo-Platonic philosophy, and Manicheism, vied for political attention and control. Augustine, himself a Manichean for nine years, until converting to Christianity at age 31 (384 CE) under the influence of Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), became bishop in modern-day Algeria in 396 CE. Another major influence on Augustine's thought was Ambrosiaster. Particularly, Ambrosiaster's commentary on Romans. Contrary to widespread belief, Augustine was not the progenitor of the faulty Latin translation of Rom. 5:12d; Ambrosiaster was. Ambrosiaster writes, "He [Paul] said *in whom* because he was referring to the race, not to a specific type. It is clear, consequently, that all sinned in Adam as in a lump [*quasi in massa*]."[122] Augustine ended up quoting this passage of

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[119] Gary Wills, *St. Augustine* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999), xiii.

[120] J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 10.

[121] Steinberg, "Rehabilitating Pelagius," 15: "All the theologians deemed heretics were still highly respected as devout Christian thinkers…[but] these writings were then removed from libraries and/or burned."

[122] Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans*, in "Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles: Romans," ed. and trans. Theodore de Bruyn, Stephen Cooper, and David Hunter (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 97.

Ambrosiaster with its mistranslation of Romans 5:12 from the Old Latin version of the Bible.[123] But unlike Augustine, Ambrosiaster held a synergistic view of grace and free will. Alexander Souter, states that, for Ambrosiaster, "It [the soul] remains essentially unaffected by the corruption of human nature that dwells in the flesh."[124] Thus, when Gerald Bray says that, "It is virtually an axiom of historical theology that the doctrine of original sin, as we recognize it today, cannot be traced back beyond Augustine," we learn that even scholars can be influenced by propaganda often rooted in the socio-cultural context of their time.[125] For example, Tertullian, not Augustine, devised the "Traducian theory," the idea that Adam's sin is seminally transmitted, along with the soul, from one generation to the next. Similarly, Latin bishop Cyprian (d. 258) spoke of a "hereditary infection by sin." Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), who happened to be Augustine's mentor, spoke of "hereditary sins" (*peccata hereditaria*); all these thinkers were, not coincidentally, Latin.[126] While Bray later admits that "Ambrosiaster was an 'Augustinian' *avant la lettre*," and "Augustine's ideas were more traditional and less innovative than is often thought," he believes Ambrose of Milan's notion of inherited guilt is the only concept similar to Augustine's original sin, "which followed neither Tertullian nor Origen."[127] Bray is correct that Tertullian did not believe sexual transmission of sin eliminated free will, as Augustine did, but Bray missed the fact that Tertullian's Traducianism, and Cyprian's view of hereditary sin, were

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[123] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 70; Cranfield, "The Consecutive Meaning," 321–39.

[124] Alexander Souter, *Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81-82. See also, Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 71.

[125] Gerald Bray, *Original Sin in Patristic Thought* (London: Churchman, 1994), 37.

[126] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 71.

[127] Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), xxi.

essential for Augustine's belief that free will was lost at the "Fall." Namely, because Adam lost his free will to choose between good and evil, according to Augustine, all who descend from Adam also lose their free will because they were "in Adam" when he sinned.

Augustine's assertion that hereditary sin significantly impairs the individual's freedom to choose the good without divine grace represents a crucial departure from his predecessors. Augustine introduced a new theological era, not by endorsing hereditary sin, but by upending a view in which free will and determinism could work compatibly. In this context, Augustine can be regarded as a synthesizer and elaborator rather than a creator of the doctrine of original sin. He drew upon the foundation laid by Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose to develop a more intricate and comprehensive theological framework.

The main questions and topics I will be addressing in this chapter are: (1) Who is Pelagius? What role did he play in Augustine's doctrine of original sin? (2)What were the major events that led to Pelagius's excommunication? and, (3) How did his excommunication affect the Reformation, and society and religion in America today?

The Moral Concern of Pelagius

According to Alexander Souter and John Ferguson, Pelagius was born around 360 CE in the British Isles.[128] He was learned in both Greek and Latin, unlike Augustine who only knew Latin. He was acquainted with the teachings of classical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato's theory of the Forms, Aristotle's doctrine of substance, Stoicism's law of nature and morality, and

[128] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 41; Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St Paul: Text*, Texts and Studies IX (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 3–4.

Christian writers such as Jerome, Rufinus, Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.[129] His father demanded he train for a secular career in law, but he had a religious calling, so he left Britian and embraced an ascetic life as a layman. According to Mercator, a friend of Augustine's, Pelagius imbibed the opinions of Rufinus—theologian and notable translator of Greek patristic material, such as Origen—during this time, which would explain Pelagius's knowledge of the Greek fathers.[130] Pelagius stayed mostly in Rome from about 384–409, where he wrote his monumental commentary on Paul. During this time he forged a close friendship with Celestius. Celestius, a young aristocratic Christian originally trained in legal life, later converted to religious life and radicalized the views of Pelagius. Celestius is largely responsible for pioneering the "Pelagianism" movement. "Indeed it is doubtful a major controversy would ever have burst out but for his outspoken advocacy," Ferguson writes.[131] Though both share a similar disregard of Augustine's hereditary sin, Pelagius was not a debater like Celestius and did not care to spread intellectual views for their own sake. He was afraid that Augustine's doctrine of original sin would only increase the moral disintegration of Christian laymen and clergy in Rome. Pelagius felt Augustine's doctrine would weaken the separation between Christian and pagan.[132] Namely, he was worried that Augustine's doctrine would nullify Christians' aspiration to live holy lives since sin is inevitable and a moral disability of the soul.

[129] Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions*, ch. 5.

[130] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 44.

[131] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 48.

[132] Augustine calls Pelagius a "worthy man" and an eminent Christian in, *A Treatise On Merit and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants*, trans. Peter Holmes (Hawthorne, CA: Aeterna Press, 2015), 3.1, 3.6.

The event that catalyzed this controversy was in 405 CE, recorded by Augustine himself in *On the Predestination of Saints*. A bishop quoted to Pelagius a famous prayer from Augustine's *Confessions*, which read, "Give me the grace to do as You command, and command me to do what You will."[133] Augustine reflects on the struggles he faced in his earlier life, particularly his internal conflicts and sinful behaviors. He admits he is incapable of obeying God's commands unless God grants him the ability to do so. His willpower alone is not enough to resist sin. Upon hearing this, Pelagius's moral beacon flashed in his head. Pelagius disagreed. Pelagius believed the very fact that God would command something implies that humans have the ability to obey it. Moreover, he thought this prayer made humans into marionettes and ignored Paul's moral admonition, "Live by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Pelagius was so disturbed, in fact, that he wrote a letter to his friend, Paulinus of Nola, whom Augustine also knew. Augustine later read this letter of Pelagius.[134] Augustine thought Pelagius's letter extolled the powers of human nature, not grace. So the tension began. But it was not until Pelagius and Celestius withdrew from Rome in 409, that writings regarding the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine appear again.

The Determinism of Augustine (350–430 CE)

No African bishop would have more influence on Western Christianity than Augustine. He was born in Thagaste, North Africa, in 354 CE, to a pagan father and devout Christian mother. Educated with an emphasis on Latin literature, he would aim to become a teacher of

[133] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 10.40.

[134] Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin* (Hawthorne, CA38.

rhetoric. He eventually got a teaching position in Milan, where he met Ambrose, leading to his conversion in 386 CE (31 years old). Prior to Augustine's conversion to Christianity, he was part of the Manichean sect, a gnostic religious group that adhered to the teachings of Mani. They believe in a dualistic worldview where the material world was associated with darkness and evil, while the spiritual realm was linked to light and goodness.

Augustine became a brilliant theologian and his expertise and prolific work should not be overlooked or compromised simply because he followed Ambrosiaster's mistranslation of Romans 5:12. He managed to write an impressive 93 books, 300 letters, and over 400 sermons.[135] Augustine's zeal exceeded that of nearly all his contemporaries, making him one of the most popular bishops of the fifth century. He possessed a distinctive protective instinct, rooted in his deep love and compassion, which compelled him to actively challenge and rectify various Christian groups straying from the path of the Catholic Church. As Medaille writes, "One's arguments are dictated as much by one's opponent as by the needs of a consistent philosophy. Rhetoric can become a contest, with the need to win dominating the need for consistency. And Augustine could not bear to lose, and could not concede to his opponents anything but the bare minimum."[136] Like Paul, he could produce original answers to his opponents, establishing key features of what Christians (and even non-Christians) in the West, now consider Christianity.

Before knowing anything of Pelagius, Augustine endorsed freedom of the human will. He quotes Sirach 15:17 to critique the Manicheans for denying moral autonomy in, *On the Free*

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[135] Wills, *St. Augustine*, xi.

[136] John Medaille, "The Fatal Argument: Augustine and Pelagius." In *SOTF*, 3, https://www.academia.edu/899158303.

Choice of the Will (ca. 387). "'He sets fire and water before you: stretch forth your hand to whichever you will. Before us is life and death, and whichever you please shall be given you' (Sirach 15:17). We see expressed here most clearly the free choice of the human will."[137] Like Pelagius, he agrees that humans have the freedom to choose between good and evil.[138] And again, he says "infants cry and resist when they are baptized," which "would be a grave sin of irreligion if they already had the use of free choice."[139] Augustine initially believed that mankind's will to choose good or evil was an inalienable endowment from the Creator which Adam's sin cannot damage, but he changed his mind around 397 CE, stating that the natural will given at birth is affected by "original sin." Augustine comments on Romans 7:10 saying, "Good does not dwell in him [Paul], meaning that sin…derives from the punishment for the original sin [*originale peccatum*]."[140] Moreover, from original sin comes "original guilt" (*originalis reatus*) and as such infants deserve punishment.[141] This line of thought is present in *Confessions* (c. 400), where he posits a battle between two wills. His old will desires temporal things, while a new will, rising within him with the help of grace, desires eternal things, and must be done by the grace of God. Augustine writes in *Confessions* that "no man is free from sin, not even a child

[137] Augustine, *On Grace and Free Choice*, trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

[138] Harrill, "How the West Got Paul Wrong," 151; see also, Medaille, "Fatal Argument"; Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

[139] Augustine, *On Grace and Free Choice*, 181.

[140] Augustine, *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, ed. Raymond Canning, The Works of Saint Augustine (New York: New City Press, 2008), 179.

[141] Augustine, *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, 204.

who has lived only one day on earth." [142] Indeed, recalling when he was a child, "I deserved a scolding for what I did; but since I could not have understood the scolding, it would have been unreasonable, and most unusual, to rebuke me."[143] Augustine knows he was born in sin because of Adam, and was deserving of his penalty. He writes later on, "If Adam had not fallen from you, the seed that flowed from him would not have been this bitter sea, the human race, forever chafing for knowledge in the profound depths of its ignorance."[144] If Adam had not sinned, humanity—the "seed" mentioned here refers to the descendants of Adam and Eve—would not be in its current state of turmoil and endless quest for knowledge.

Prior to encountering Pelagius, we learn from Augustine's *Confessions* that he was a Traducianist—he believed sin was inherited via Adam's "seed"—which made all of Adam's posterity guilty. However, the human will was still intact at this point for Augustine: God transforms our old will, the law of the flesh, into a new will, the law of the spirit, analogous to the Holy Spirit and Love.[145] The human will is not displaced or incontrovertibly damaged but plays a role in salvation by God's grace making it righteous. That is, until we get to Pelagius, where Augustine defines freedom as the ability to only choose evil to counter Pelagius's belief that non-Christians have the innate freedom to choose righteousness or wickedness.

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[142] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.7.

[143] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.7.

[144] Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.20.

[145] Augustine, *On the Trinity,* trans. Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.21.41: "Nothing…respecting the Holy Spirit appears to be like Him, except our own will, or love, or affection, which is a stronger will."

The Pelagian Controversy: Five Main Events

The series of historical events surrounding the Pelagian controversy in the early fifth century is complex, tedious, and heavily disputed due to extensive, and incongruent, historical data. As a result, the problems presenting a consistent timeline cause many scholars, such as John Toews, J. Patout Burns, and J. B. Stump, to give minimal attention to the historical events leading up to Pelagius's excommunication, and instead focus on the individual works which Pelagius and Augustine wrote. The issue with this, as historian and expert on Pelagius, John Ferguson (1921–1989) notes in his work, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction* (1956), is solely reading each thinker's works completely ignores the reality that most of Pelagius's works are destroyed. Pelagius's views are mostly expressed in the historical records of the synods and councils, as well as in Augustine's works. It also ignores how much of the conflict that took place between Pelagius and Augustine was inspired by Pelagius's follower Celestius, who took Pelagius's teachings to the extreme. In fact, Pelagius himself condemned and disavowed Celestius's extreme views.[146] Moreover, it did not take just one council/synod to excommunicate Pelagius, as it did for most heretics, but five councils. In all three synods held in the East, Pelagius was deemed orthodox, but in the two African-Western synods, where Pelagius was not present to defend himself, Augustine's persistence and influence led to his classification as a heretic. Three main reasons for Augustine's triumph over Pelagius were: (1) Augustine's influence in the Western churches resulted in the general acceptance of his interpretation of Rom. 5:12 to prove inherited sin and guilt, (2) the rise of an intellectually guided Church aimed to solidify ecclesiastical boundaries, and (3) language and cultural barriers between Greek-speaking Palestine's and Latin-speaking Africans created confusion in defining technical terms

[146] John Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, 88–9.

such as “nature” and “grace.” Despite how most scholars approached original sin, the issue was not merely theological, but politically and geographically bound. I will briefly summarize the five main councils/synods that led to Pelagius’s demise: the Council of Carthage (411), Synod of Jerusalem (415), Synod of Disopolis (415), Synod of Carthage (416), Synod of Carthage (417).

In 411 CE, a significant encounter took place that led to Augustine and Pelagius meeting for the first time. In the Western Council of Carthage (411), Celestius, a follower of Pelagius, faced legal charges by Paulinus, the judge of the council, after winning over a large number of Christian communities for asserting that baptism was less for remission of sin than for a higher union with Christ.[147] Celestius responded “perhaps” when demanding a “yes” or “no” from Paulinus, and consequently was accused of heresy for his reluctance to affirm that the purpose of infant baptism was for remission of sins.[148] Meanwhile, Pelagius, unaware of the synod, was on a brief trip to Palestine. During this time, Augustine delved deeper into Pelagius’s teachings—specifically, the teaching that both God’s grace and human will play a role in salvation, now known as “synergism.” In his work *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins* (c. 411), Augustine argued that unbaptized infants are condemned, even though they do not yet possess a developed will.[149] In response to Pelagius's view that grace and human will can be synthesized, Augustine reevaluated his position, ultimately asserting that the will is no longer solely our own but God's. Logically then, all individuals are predestined: As he notes, “It is not of him that wills, nor of

[147] Augustine, *On Merit and Forgiveness of Sins*, 3.12.

[148] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 50.

[149] Augustine, *On Merit and Forgiveness of Sins*, 1.21.

him that runs, but of God that shows mercy, that we do good works."[150] This shift marked a departure from his earlier position in *Confessions* and *On Grace and Free Choice*, that the human will was its own cause, i.e., the human is the only source for causing the will.[151] Augustine upheld his new notion of predestination by arguing that the Greek phrase *eph hō* in Romans 5:12d, translated as "in whom" (*in quo* in Latin), meant that all sinned "in Adam," and as such were equally deserving of punishment upon birth. Thus, to fully counter Pelagius's view, Augustine was "obliged to assert with such sinewy vigor the justly eternal torment of babes who died unbaptized."[152]

Augustine's new theory proposed God held sole responsibility for human salvation (known as, "monogenism"). Augustine posited that humans had the capacity to exercise their free will only in choosing various evil actions, not virtuous ones, without God's grace. Eric Jenkins believes the first appearance of Augustine's theory is in *Letter 194* (418), where Augustine argues that "grace is the cause of human assent to God, a concept that excludes all human autonomy; consent no longer comes from ourselves but is the product of grace."[153] Choosing to love God is, in essence, a finite illusion; rather, God loves Himself through us. If Augustine were to assign any part of the credit for salvation to human beings rather than God alone, it would not only mirror the view of Pelagius, but it could give Pelagius the leverage to incorporate his notion that God's grace naturally accompanies our free will, meaning it's infused

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[150] Augustine, *On the Predestination of Saints*, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Wallis, NPNF[1], vol. 5 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 1.7.

[151] Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.11; Augustine, *On Grace and Free Choice*, 37.

[152] John Medaille, "The Fatal Argument: Augustine and Pelagius."

[153] Eric Jenkins, *Free to Say No?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), no.1. 2144 and 2139.

within innate freedom and not an additional separate element that comes from Christ. This idea enraged Augustine, as Pelagius failed to expound upon this point, as we will see.

Four years later, Augustine's pupil Orosius, a Spanish priest, was told by Jerome to examine the so-called "heresy" of Pelagius after Pelagius criticized Jerome's epistle on the Ephesians.[154] Orosius accused Pelagius of heresy in the Synod of Jerusalem (July, 415), overseen by bishop John of Jerusalem, who "truly loved" Pelagius, according to Augustine.[155] Orosius accused Pelagius of believing that "a man can, if he will, live without sin, and easily keep God's commandments," to which Pelagius agreed, but explained that by sinlessness he means a state "granted by God" to a person who responds to God out of prayer and revelation, not a "natural endowment of sinlessness." He quoted 1 Cor 15:10, Rom. 9:16, and Ps. 127:1 to disavow that a man could advance in virtue apart from help of God.[156] The tables were turned. Orosius could not counter Pelagius's riposte because his Greek was poor—the synod demanded they speak only in Greek—and he knew he lost. He would, from now on, accuse Pelagius of heresy to the churches in the West.

While Orosius learned his lesson to stick to Latin speaking sessions, two Gallic bishops, Heros of Arles, and Lazarus of Aiz, accused both Celestius and Pelagius of heresy in the Synod of Disopolis (December 415) for the same reason that bothered Orosius. Namely, that a man can, if he wills, be without sin. Pelagius further elaborated on his position at this synod. Pelagius said *potential* sinlessness is possible insofar as the personal effort is combined with the grace of God

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[154] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 82–83.

[155] Augustine, "Letter 179," in *Letters 156–210*, trans. Roland Teske (New York: New City Press, 2004), 155.

[156] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 83.

(*proprio labore et Dei gratia*).[157] Pelagius was exempted from heresy and excused by bishop Eulogius to leave the session. But Celestius was not; he was accused of believing victory comes from the human will, sinlessness is equal to being a son of God, and grace is given according to merit. Pelagius intervened in and stated the ascribed assertions were not his, but Celestius's, believing the ascribed views of Celestius were repugnant.[158] Augustine was told by his colleagues who attended the session that Pelagius anathematized the accusations of Celestius.

Orosius was not done trying to excommunicate Pelagius, though. He remained committed to his word and hastened to North Africa after failing to convince John, the judge of the synod, that Pelagius was a heretic. In 416 CE, Orosius carried letters from bishops Heros, Lazarus, and Jerome to Africa. The letters contained a list of reasons for why Pelagius should be excommunicated. Orosius studied them before the hearing, and was prepared to counter Pelagius.[159] Orosius and sixty-seven other bishops from Africa gathered at the synod of Carthage (Latin speaking West) to anathematize Pelagius. To increase the chances of gaining the bishop of Rome's attention, another synod was held in Mileve, a city in Numidia. Fifty-nine bishops gathered in Numidia, one of which was Augustine; he held the apostolic chair of Numidia.[160] Both synods anathematized Pelagius and Celestius—neither of whom were invited to attend—for doing "away with the need for grace and recourse to prayer, and that their attitude to infant baptism, by denying its necessity for salvation, was in effect condemning [rejecting] children to

[157] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 88.

[158] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 89.

[159] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 93.

[160] This was the first time Pelagius and Celestius had a joint condemnation.

eternal death."[161] To secure their victory, five of the most influential bishops—Alypius, Augustine, Aurelius, Evodius, and Possidius—met at Milevium to send a joint letter to Innocent I, the bishop of Rome, requesting he join in their excommunication of Pelagius and Celestius.[162] The letter that was sent to the bishop of Rome said Pelagius was purposefully ambiguous in his words, and that it was hard to understand him without a Greek interpreter. The African bishops also enclosed a copy of Pelagius's "On the Nature of Grace" in their letter.[163] As the pressure-group influenced Innocent I, they admitted that Pelagius did not hold some of the views people believed he did, but because most laypeople could not discern the two, it was best to err on the side of caution, and condemn Pelagius altogether.[164] Innocent I replied, saying he had never met any Pelagians in Rome, and believed some of the synod's records, such as Diospolis's (415), might have been edited to make Pelagius look worse. However, after Innocent I read Pelagius' "On the Nature of Grace," he thought Pelagius denied the necessity of real grace, and excommunicated him, along with Celestius.[165] Forty-four days after this sentence, Innocent I died.

After receiving word of his sentence, Pelagius was openly disturbed, and immediately wrote Jerome a treatise called, "Freedom of the Will." Pelagius's work is now lost; only fragments remain within Augustine's tract, "On Original Sin." With the work that remains, we

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[161] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 93.

[162] Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, 2.9.

[163] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 92; the Nicene creed also said nothing about original sin being a doctrinal division, but rather the Trinity and the person of Christ.

[164] Augustine, *Letter 183*, in "Letters 156–210," 172.

[165] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 95.

know Pelagius clarified a few points: (1) All are born in a morally neutral condition, neither evil nor good; (2) Infants should be baptized to be admitted into "kingdom of heaven," not for the remission of sins;[166] (3) Power of human nature comes from God at birth, desire comes from will, and realization comes from the result; (4) Christ sustains us in the action by his teaching and "enlightening us through the gift of His heavenly grace"; and (5) Adam's sin harmed humanity, not by physical transmission, but by social example.[167] A more reliable source of Pelagius that remains intact is a defense Pelagius wrote called "The Book of Faith," that he sent to Innocent I. The letter claims that the only works Pelagius felt truly embodied the expressions of his mind were his letters to Constantius, Demetrias, and his recent treatise, "Freedom of the Will." Pelagius reiterates, in the letter to Innocent I, that freedom is the ability to sin or refrain from sinning, and while freedom "belongs to all men; in Christians alone is it aided by grace."[168] He says souls are a direct creation of God (denying pre-existence of souls and Augustine's traducianism), and that "Man has always the freedom to sin or not to sin, and always stands in need of the help of God."[169] This letter could have led Innocent I to change his mind, but he died before he received it.

Zosimus succeeded Innocent I, and he reopened the case in November 417 at Rome. Zosimus read Pelagius's "The Book of Faith" at the public assembly. They observed Pelagius professed a need for God's grace for virtuous action. The assembly, astounded Pelagius demanded the necessity of God's grace for righteous living, led Zosimus to pronounce the creed

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[166] Pelagius makes a distinction between "kingdom of heaven" and "eternal life."

[167] Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ and On Original Sin*, 2.13, 15, 18–22.

[168] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 99.

[169] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 100.

of Pelagius fully orthodox and catholic.[170] However, Zosimus only read Pelagian's most recent writings to the assembly, which were geared towards minimizing the difference between Pelagius's conception of freedom and Augustine's concept of grace. Once Zosimus saw earlier documents written by Pelagius, a final council was ordered; the Council of Carthage in May of 418 CE.

After reading earlier documents of Pelagius, Zosimus reversed his decision and reopened an investigation. Augustine felt certain that if he presented the same propositions Innocent I found offensive, Zosimus would condemn Pelagius. But Zosimus was content to deliberate on the matter of Pelagius and Celestius's excommunication, given the multitude of incoming letters, and the lack of ecclesiastical authority. As a result, numerous impatient African bishops, with Augustine presumably first on the list, insisted that the intervention of civil authorities was required to deal with the heretical issue. Count Valerius, Roman praetor of Africa and personal friend of Augustine, assisted in getting the Roman Emperor, Honorius, involved with the case. In fact, Honorius wrote a letter the following year to a Roman politician stating, "his action was taken in deference to the latter's [African bishops] judgement." [171]

Once the followers of Pelagius and Celestius heard of Emperor Honorius demanding action, they rioted the streets of Rome. The African bishops, including Augustine, could now claim political reasons to Honorius to justify why Pelagius and Celestius should be excommunicated: the attack upon the emperor, disorder in the streets of Rome, and disturbances across the Middle East. A doctrine that persuaded the mass of ordinary Christians they were unworthy and powerless supplicants would be useful to Honorius's command.

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[170] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 106.

[171] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 110.

Emperor Honorius wrote a letter to Praetorian Prefect Palladius on April 30, 418, "commanding the banishment of Pelagius, Celestius, and all their adherents."[172] Eighteen Italian bishops, led by bishop Julian, protested in support of Pelagius; Pelagius himself assented to believing in the grace of God for salvation. However, once Zosimus heard of the riots and Honorius's delegation, he declared Pelagius and Celestius heretical. "In a volteface almost unprecedented in the history of the papacy, he [Zosimus] drew up an 'epistola tractoria,' declaring Pelagius and Celestius of transgressing the central tenets of the Christian doctrine of redemption, and thereby to be executed."[173] The very next day, on April 31, 418, two hundred bishops met back at the council in Carthage and composed nine canons to anathematize Pelagius and Celestius.

The first three canons were specifically aimed at Pelagius' denial of Augustine's doctrine of original sin: (1) Adam was not created mortal, but his sin caused death; (2) Infants are baptized for remission of sins to remove original sin "layer" prior to committing sin, and (3) There is no middle state "kingdom of heaven" different from eternal life where infants live happily forever; rather, they are eternally damned.[174] Though Pelagius believed Adam introduced death, Pelagius would deny the second and third canon because, naturally, he could not bear the thought of infants, whose death was not their fault, being eternally tormented. Three other canons dealt with grace, specifically anathematizing Pelagius's view that grace works alongside free will to conduct good works. The last three canons were concerned with the universality of

[172] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 111.

[173] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 113.

[174] Council of Carthage, "Council of Carthage (419 A.D.)," trans. Henry Percival in NPNF^2, vol. 14, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), nn. 109-116.

sin and the true nature and meaning of prayer. The true meaning of prayer was to admit one's sinful condition because it is universally inherited. Again, Pelagius's concerns were moral, rather than theological. He did not want Christians to think they are unable to live lives set apart from nonbelievers because they are born in sin. Many of Pelagius's views are, essentially, the Catholic position today, such as unbaptized babies not going to hell.[175] Despite his longing for reconciliation with Augustine, the Council of Ephesus in 431, led by Cyril, wrote a synodal letter approving of the deposition of Pelagius and Celestius from Rome. The battle was lost, and Pelagius fled to Egypt.

The Second Council of Orange (529) successfully extinguished the Pelagianism movement in the West. Adopting Augustine's exact phrases in nearly half of the 25 canons, the council claimed, "Adam's sin 'passed on' to his descendants," and no one can 'think or choose any good thing' without baptism, not even choosing to get baptized because, 'by free choice no one can come to the grace of baptism.'"[176] In other words, one doesn't even choose to become Christian. Augustine's ideas limited the Spirit of Christ by substituting it for Grace. He also limited salvation to the visible church by giving baptism into the Catholic Church the distinct prominence of electing grace. But still, Augustine won the fight. A thousand years later, former Augustinian monk Martin Luther (1483–1546) would not only adopt Augustine's idea that humans inherit Adamic sin and guilt and are "condemn[ed] to eternal wrath" without baptism but carry Augustine's traducianism into the Protestant Reformation.[177]

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[175] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 353.

[176] Council of Orange. "Canons of the Second Council of Orange, A.D. 529," trans. Francis Henry (Oxford: J. Thornton, 1882), 19–27.

[177] Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 29.

Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to reveal the complex nature of Augustine's doctrine of original sin; one that is often overlooked by many Western theologians. Augustine's doctrine of original sin has shaped many American moral frameworks and mindsets. Pelagius's opposition to Augustine's doctrine of original sin was born from a desire to promote Christian morality in the face of the immoral Christian society he witnessed in Rome. Language barriers, Augustine's political influence, Pelagius's ambiguity on the definition of grace, and his denial that infant baptism is for the remission of sins led, eventually, to his condemnation.

Pelagius disagreed with Pelagians who thought that humans can be made righteous by their own natural powers; however, he has nevertheless been historically credited to teaching it due to Celestius "emboldening" his teachings. Thus, when Mark Tietjen says that "the fourth-century heretic Pelagius…promotes what Scripture sometimes refers to as works-righteousness," this demonstrates how educated scholars read *about* Pelagius rather than examine *what* he actually wrote.[178] Few are aware that Pelagius emphatically denied works-righteousness at the synod of Jerusalem (415). "I did not mean human nature has natural endowment of sinlessness; I meant that the person who is prepared to toil and strive to avoid sin and to walk in the commandments of God on behalf of his own salvation, is granted by God the possibility of so doing."[179] And again, in Pelagius's *Libellus Fidei* to Pope Innocent I, he rejects the accusation of

[178] Mark A. Tietjen, *Kierkegaard: A Christian Missionary to Christians* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 57.

[179] Ferguson*, Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 84.

"man's ability to avoid sin as to exclude God's grace."[180] Pelagius also rejected the position of Celestius that "when we conquer sin, it is not by the grace of God."[181]

While critics might accuse Pelagius of downplaying his views at trials and in his appeals, we know from the extant writings what Pelagius taught: (1) Human beings are born in a morally neutral slate—he wrote, "the good can only be done voluntarily by being also capable of evil" (cf., Sir. 15:16);[182] (2) Each soul is created at the time of conception; it is not created from the souls of the parents of Adam; (3) People feel inclined to sin (an action, not an entity) because Adam's sin influenced habit, environment, and example;[183] (4) Adam introduced death in the world, being the first man, so Christ came to redeem humanity from death;[184] and (5) Infant baptism is spiritually nourishing, not a salvific remission of sins.[185] The best arguments in favor of Pelagius are: (1) If sin comes from one's nature, it's not sin, since there is no choice, (2) if it comes from the will, the will can be changed by the will, and (3) if it comes from the inside, man is not responsible for a failure his very nature prohibits him from being.[186] The best objections against Pelagius are: (1) Christ sets more than just an example of illumination, (2) he reduces the mode of the Holy Spirit to the will, and (3), he restricts sin to physical actions.

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[180] Augustine, *On the Grace of God and On Original Sin*, 1.33.

[181] Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius*, 1.30.

[182] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrius*, 42. Cf., "tabula rasa."

[183] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 60.

[184] Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 117.

[185] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 76.

[186] Augustine, *Letters*, 156.

Augustine believed Pelagius's ideas placed righteousness and salvation outside of Christ and His Church, into the Law, and oneself. If human nature can attain eternal life unaided, then faith in Christ is needless.[187] Augustine's main teachings of original sin can be summarized as follows: (1) Adam was born in a prelapsarian state with freedom of choice between good and evil; (2) When the first couple rebelled, they were punished (became mortal) and incurred guilt transmitted by sex;[188] (3) It is transmitted through sex *because* Rom. 5:12 says all sin in Adam and are thus under a just condemnation at birth;[189] (4) Without grace of Christ through baptism, humanity is fallen and can only freely choose to do evil despite knowing what is good; (5) Therefore, infants who die unbaptized are damned, because if not, it minimizes the grace of God towards those whom He selected for salvation.[190] Augustine was originally willing to admit the possibility of sinlessness in this life through the Holy Spirit, a position he once held,[191] but later rejected. Exempting Jesus and Mary, he believed Adam transmitted concupiscence (sexual passion/lust), a moral disability and involuntary drive that can only be overcome by being born free from sex.[192] Crucially, Augustine's background in Manichaeism and neo-Platonism is evident in his negative outlook of sexuality, for if sin is not sexually transmitted, then infant baptism is not needed.

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[187] Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 1.2.

[188] Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 14.

[189] Augustine, *Letters*, 186.

[190] Ferguson, *Pelagius*: *A Historical Introduction*, 100.

[191] Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius*, 1.55.

[192] Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, trans. Peter Holmes, *NPNF*, vol. 5, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 4.27.

The controversy between Pelagius and Augustine should not solely be seen as a battle of opposing viewpoints; rather, their controversy represents an invitation to embrace complementary truths. Pelagius's emphasis on the "natural holiness of one's heart," and original sin as environmentally induced, resonates with Paul's distinction of moral transgression and cosmic sin. Augustine's emphasis that what one knows is right is hard to enact in their daily life without the grace of God working through faith in Christ, resonates with Paul's assertion that the law, without Christ's power, is unable to free one from the grasp of Sin. Simultaneously, Paul would agree with both Pelagius and Augustine that Sin is universal, but would equally disagree with their definition of "sin" as moral inhibitions, whether entity or act; they both failed to understand Sin as a cosmic power. Pelagius was correct in protesting Augustine's diluted form of Paul's hamartiology, and Augustine was right in protesting Pelagius's diluted form of Paul's hamartiology, but for different reasons. Augustine's doctrine morally meant that all who came before Christ, or died as infants, were riddled with sin and damned to hell because the infants were, in spirit, with and *in* Adam when he sinned in the garden. Meanwhile, Pelagius mistakenly argued using Augustine's framework, that those who came before the incarnation could be free from sin by the Spirit. For Paul, those before Christ were not sinless because Sin as power is not defeated until Death is, which happened when Jesus was resurrected. Thus, Pelagius's understanding of sin is definitively bound to actions, causing Augustine to properly observe that sinful motivation is not always discernible in moral acts: two men join the army, one because he is afraid of public dissent, the other because he stands against tyranny and aggression.[193]

[193] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 162; Mark Given, email message to author, May 24, 2023: "While Augustine was wrong to turn Paul's notion of sin into something passed on biologically to the whole human race, very much like a disease, he was not wrong to oppose Pelagius's rather optimistic and naïve estimation of human moral potential."

Nonetheless, Augustine's loco-political and social leverage, within the theological debate, assisted in securing a victory over Pelagius's anthropological construct of salvation.

If sin is defined in terms of guilt or hereditary sin, then Pelagius's critique is sound, because innate moral fault implies the possibility of a righteous choice. However, if sin is defined as a barrier between man and God, then one could say humans are born naturally separated from God, for which we are not guilty, and we can choose to overcome that barrier. But I believe this would better be described as "original death," since Paul clearly believes Adam initiated the spread of death insofar as he was mortal.

Contemporary Effect on Western Christianity

The controversy between Pelagius and Augustine in the fifth century continues to have a lasting impact on Christianity in the West. The legacy of this controversy can still be seen in theological discussions and denominational differences. Debates continue about the interplay between human agency and divine sovereignty within Christian theology and practices in Western Christianity. To examine these denominational differences, I will briefly note the views of some major denominations of Christianity in the West: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed (Presbyterian and Southern Baptist), Anglican (Episcopalian), Methodist, and Mainline Baptist.

I earlier noted that, for Augustine, if sin is not sexually transmitted, then infant baptism is not necessary. Today, the Catholic church rejects several of Augustine's positions: (1) the belief that sin is sexually transmitted, (2) the concept of predestination, (3) the notion of inherited guilt, (4) the absolute damnation of unbaptized infants, and (5) the interpretation of Romans 5:12d as "in whom," – all of which were also rejected by Pelagius. The Catholic Church also rejects certain elements of Pelagius's teachings, in favor of Augustine's, such as: (1) infants must be

baptized for the remission of sins, (2) humans have a fallen nature where immortality and union with God was lost, and (3) humans inherit moral corruption that stays even after baptism, i.e., concupiscence.

Some might ask, "how is this possible?" After all, the Council of Carthage (418) supported Augustine's damnation of unbaptized children in canon three and supported his denial of free choice regarding baptism and hereditary sin in the Council of Orange (529).[194] However, these councils are not considered "ecumenical councils" by the Catholic Church, and therefore not dogma. Augustinianism never asserted itself as Catholic orthodoxy, despite some Catholic leaders being Augustinian, such as Pope Leo I. Rather, it was the "unorthodox" reformers, Luther and John Calvin, not the orthodox Catholics, who were the real heirs of Augustine.[195]

According to the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, sin is an "offense against God," spurred by a "desire contrary to the eternal law."[196] Indeed, sin is a personal act that "requires complete consent" and assumes the "radical possibility of human freedom."[197] So, why does the Catholic Church call it "original sin," and say the purpose of infant baptism is to be freed of the "taint by original sin,"[198] when sin is, according to the above definition, a moral offense that requires "complete consent"? Thus, the catechism admits the word "sin" in the phrase "original sin" is used "only in an analogical sense; it is a sin 'contracted' and not

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[194] Council of Orange, "Canons," 27.

[195] The Council of Ephesus (431) was an ecumenical council that condemned Pelagius and Celestius, but without stating reasons, only implicitly referring to the Council of Carthage.

[196] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 505.

[197] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 508.

[198] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 350.

'committed'—a state and not an act."[199] In other words, the word "sin" in "original sin" is not actually sin, but a state one is in. However paradoxically, infants are regularly remitted of a sin that, by Roman Catholicism's definition, is not actual sin. Therefore, if my findings are correct about the equivocation of "sin" and "creationism–traducianism" in Catholic theology, then major consequences follow for infant baptism and the doctrine of original sin.

Session five of the ecumenical Council of Trent (1545–1563), celebrated on June, 1546, under Pope Paul III, focused on the decree concerning original sin, and defended it *using Augustine's mistranslation of Romans 5:12*:

> If anyone asserts that the prevarication of Adam injured himself alone, and not his posterity; and that he lost for himself alone, and not for us also, the holiness and justice, received of God, which he lost; or that he, defiled by the sin of disobedience, has only transfused death, and pains of the body, into the whole human race, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul, let him be anathema; inasmuch as he contradicts the apostle, who says: By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned [Rom. 5:12].[200]

Adam lost and injured holiness, justice, and immortality not only for himself, but the entire human race, and this confers "the guilt of original sin," because his sin is "transfused into all by propagation, not by imitation."[201] Moreover, there are latent contradictions within the current

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[199] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 114.

[200] T.A. Buckley, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Abingdon, VA: George Routledge and Co., 1851), 22.

[201] T.A. Buckley, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 23.

catechism in its attempt to bridge the Council of Trent's Traducian view with the Creationist view of Pelagius. For one, the Council of Trent endorses inherited guilt and implies Traducianism, but the catechism says, "The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not 'produced' by the parents," and "original sin does not have the character of personal fault."[202] At the same time, however, the catechism says Adam "has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the 'death of the soul,'" and inclination to evil (concupiscence) persists even after baptism, referencing the Council of Trent and Augustine.[203]

Nowhere does the catechism or Council of Trent explain how sin is "propagated" and "transmitted" yet simultaneously not hereditary or "produced by the parents," nor how we inherit Adam's guilt yet there being no personal fault for it. In effect, the 21st century Catholic Church would fit the qualifications of heresy by Augustine. Contradictions in terms are evident because the Catholic Church established the doctrine of original sin, but later abolished most of its premises that Augustine used to establish it. Catholic professor of theology at Notre Dame, Fr. Richard McBrien, also sees the glaring contradictions I have noticed. He writes, "If there's no limbo and we're not going to revert to St. Augustine's teaching that unbaptized infants go to hell, we're left with only one option, namely, that everyone is born in the state of grace. Baptism does not exist to wipe away the 'stain' of original sin, but to initiate one into the Church."[204]

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[202] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 104.

[203] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 113–14.

[204] Matthew Newsome, "Let the Children Come to Me," Catholic Answers, November 1, 2007, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/let-the-children-come-to-me.

The doctrine of original sin in Roman Catholicism must either be relinquished or modified with reference to Pelagius. Some Catholic theologians have already sought to redefine original sin. Referencing Rom. 5:12a, which says, "sin came into the world," one of the most influential Catholic theologians, Fr. Karl Rahner, argues that Pelagius can be rehabilitated as an endorsement of original sin as "sin of the world."[205] Indeed, the Roman Rite Mass already proclaims, "Blessed are You, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (cf., John 1:27).[206] Respectively, the Catholic Church holds, despite some contradictions oscillating between Traducianism and Creationism, a "moderate Reformed view of original sin." Fallen human beings are culpable for their actual sins, but the moral corruption (concupiscence) inevitably yields the actual sin, baptized or unbaptized.

Lutheranism: As mentioned earlier, Martin Luther (1483–1546), was an Augustinian monk who, abandoning the Roman Catholic Church over religious legalism, fully adopted Augustine's doctrine of original sin. Luther agreed with Augustine's reading of Romans 7:14-25—that Paul was a guilty sinner troubled by an introspective conscience—and placed a greater emphasis on predestination.[207] The "law" in Paul's writings meant for Luther penitential practices, namely, attempts to earn forgiveness of sins (e.g., monastic vows, indulgences, buying masses for the dead). The Augsburg Confession (1530), the main article of faith for Lutherans, states, "All men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable

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[205] Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1975), 1155.

[206] USCCB, "Texts for Order of Mass Settings," accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.usccb.org/committees/divine-worship/policies/mass-settings-texts#tab--lamb-of-god.

[207] Harrill, "How the West Got Paul Wrong," 155.

by nature to have true…faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism."[208] Faith alone (*sola fide*), is the only way to bestow righteousness and justification, as good does not dwell in the heart of human beings. Luther agrees with Augustine that Mary was conceived free from original sin by God's grace. Luther also added onto Augustine's notion of original sin—rejecting Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas's metaphysical theories—by stating justification forgives the original sin, but does not remove it as such—hence it is "justification by faith alone."[209] Lutheran reformer, Philipp Melanchthon writes, in *Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article* (1531), that "He [Luther] always wrote…that Baptism removes the guilt of original sin, although the material, as they call it, of the sin…remains."[210] While for Augustine the sin was removed, yet concupiscence remained, Luther makes no distinction between the two. A Christian, for Luther, is still a sinner ensnared by the flesh even after baptism because of Adam. As the saying goes, "I'm a sinner saved by grace."

Reformed: Luther's conception of original sin was adopted by the Reformed theology pioneered by John Calvin (1509–1564). The Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) is a part of the Reformed tradition. PCUSA's *Book of Confessions* (2016), defines original sin as "the guilt of Adam's first sin" that "corrupts his nature…inclines all to evil," spread to posterity by natural generation and—similar to the Catholic teaching—from which actual sins proceed from; sin is

[208] Theodore Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 29.

[209] J.B. Stump and Chad V. Meister, *Original Sin and the Fall*, 118.

[210] "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 100.

hereditary, and so is guilt because "all mankind…sinned in him."[211] The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) also states that the "corrupt nature remains in those who are regenerated, and, altough it is pardoned and deadened in Christ, yet it and all its impulses are truly and properly sinful."[212] Christians who are baptized, for the Reformed, still have a corrupt nature, just as non-believers do.

Evangelical: The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) provides a recent statement of faith in *Baptist Faith & Message* (2000), which states, more generously than the Reformed, that humans "inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and under condemnation."[213] Both the PCUSA and the SBC affirm Traducianism (hereditary sin), but only the former affirms inherited guilt, whereas the latter emphasizes personal wrongdoing for guilt. Hence, the SBC are not typically classified as Reformed, since some Baptists are Calvinists, and others are not. Presbyterian doctrine, then, is more faithful to Calvin, agreeing with Luther's inherited guilt and righteousness; neither guilt or righteousness come from one's own doing, but are *imputed* by God (Phil. 3:9; 1 Cor. 5:21). In other words, Adam's guilt is imputed to us at birth; Christ's righteousness is imputed to us at repentance in faith. Therefore, it is not unfair, from the Calvinist perspective, that one is born morally corrupt and guilty prior to action, since one is also

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[211] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part 1: Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2016), 227–28. See also, Kyle Dillon, "Are We Held Accountable for the Sins of Our Forefathers," Bible & Theology, The Gospel Coalition, last modified August 3, 2020, https://www.thegōspelcoalition.org/article/sins-forefathers-accountable/, for a recent analysis of inherited guilt from a Presbyterian theologian.

[212] *The Westminster Confession of Faith in Modern English* (Orlando, FL: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2010), 13.

[213] "Baptist Faith & Message 2000," Southern Baptist Convention, last modified June 2000, https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/.

reborn just as non-autonomously (cf., "double predestination"). "Original sin," Calvin writes in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), "seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature…which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works that Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' (Gal. 5:19). And that is what Paul properly calls sin."[214] Calvin's point is that Adam corrupted human nature to such a degree that Christ's righteousness cannot remit or cleanse the human soul, but can only *ascribe*, or *consider* the baptized as cleansed, because the reality is "totally depraved." In summation, Calvin accepts Augustine's, Luther's, and the Council of Trent's inherited guilt and sin, but he makes a distinction between original sin and works of the flesh. Similarly, Roman Catholicism and PCUSA make a distinction between original sin and actual sin, where the former is a corruption of nature, and the latter are immoral actions induced from a corrupted nature. While Calvin ultimately deviates from Paul in defining Sin as a "pollution instilled," he correctly notes the Pauline procession of immoral actions from Sin, e.g., "fruits of sin."[215] Both Luther (Lutheranism) and Calvin (Reformed) most closely represent the "Augustinian" view of original sin.

Anglicanism: The Church of England continue the Reformed understanding of original sin, but in the twentieth century, they deviated in certain areas. Their main official statement of doctrine, the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* (1571), states that "original sin…is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam…his own nature inclined to evil…therefore in every person born into this world, it

[214] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 251.

[215] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 251.

deserveth God's wrath and damnation."[216] When one is baptized and regenerated, the nature of sin still remains due to the desires of the flesh, article nine continues. Adam's guilt and sin are inherited, all are born deserving of wrath because of it, and baptism only cleanses the guilt, not the nature itself. More recently, however, the *Episcopal Dictionary of the Church* (1999) in the West, loosely defines original sin as "the shared condition of all humanity" that inclines our nature to evil, weakness, and sinful actions (not totally depraved).[217]

Methodism: John Wesley (1703–1791), former Anglican clergyman, and leader of a revival movement within the Church of England, wrote a sermon *On Original Sin* (1768). Wesley retained the beginning of article nine—human nature is corrupt and sin is universal because Adam's sin is hereditary—but denied inherited guilt and believed baptism could free one from sin; one does not remain totally depraved.[218] Similar to Jerome, Ambrosiaster, or Fitzmyer, Wesley believed humanity is corrupt and separated from the Divine, but we become morally depraved as a result of the will's response to the isolation.[219] By prevenient grace, God endowed the fallen, human faculties with the ability to respond to God by means of his grace. While innately inclined to evil and morally depraved, baptism or infilling of the Holy Spirit cleanses the heart from sin, and provides entire sanctification. In fact, Wesley thought Pelagius was wrongly labeled a heretic for simply insisting that Christian's may, by God's grace, "go on

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[216] *An Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles: Historical and Doctrinal*, ed. Edward Browne (Oxford: H. B. Durand, 1865), 239.

[217] *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, eds. Robert Slocum and Don Armentrout (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1999), 379.

[218] J.B. Stump and Chad V. Meister, *Original Sin and the Fall*, 58.

[219] Randy Maddox*, John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1994), 80.

to perfection" and fulfill the law of Christ.[220] Wesley's refusal to accept the idea of inherited guilt or the notion that unbaptized infants are condemned, brings him closer to the Mainline Baptist tradition.

Mainline Baptist: Baptists in America who are not Southern Baptist, Anabaptist, or a part of the Evangelical tradition, do not have a central governing authority. Consequently, their beliefs cannot be neatly summarized in this paper, similar to Pentecostals. In fact, I struggled to find contemporary work that discussed where Mainline Baptists currently stand when it comes to original sin. However, their lack of doctrinal interpretation on original sin speaks for itself. The chief founder of the American Baptist Church was Roger Williams (c. 1603–1683). Williams was inspired by the Anglican separatist, John Smyth (1570–1612),[221] founder of one of the earliest Baptist churches. John Smyth states, "the sin of Adam and Evil was real and introduced into the world a powerful tendency or inclination to sin which resulted in universal sinfulness, but it was a sinfulness by choice rather than by nature."[222] The consequence of Adamic sin is moral, not ontological, and cooperating with God's grace into repentance and obedient discipleship is the purpose of baptism. Still, determining where Mainline Baptists stand when it comes to the view of original sin is unclear, since not all Mainline Baptists agree with John Smyth's view of original sin.

Though not part of the mainline Baptist tradition, the Mennonite Brethren Church, an evangelical Anabaptist movement, use Ezekiel 18:20—"A child shall not suffer for the iniquity

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[220] Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical Introduction*, 182.

[221] The Southern Baptists also trace their family tree back to these figures, but they split with northern Baptists over slavery.

[222] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 100.

of a parent"—as a common defense for credobaptism in their doctrine. The confession of the Mennonite Brethren Church, an evangelical branch of the Anabaptist movement located in North America, reads as follows: "The first humans yielded to the tempter and fell into sin. Since then, all people disobey God and choose to sin…As a result, sin and evil have gained a hold in the world…and alienating humans from God and thus from…each other and themselves."[223] The result of all humans yielding to a tempter of sin, like Adam, is physical and spiritual death. Adam's sin is not inherited; rather, people choose to sin as Adam did. Similarly, the confessions of the Mennonite Church USA states, "Any heritage we have received from our first parents does not deprive us of our own final responsibility before God (Ezek. 18)."[224] The largest Western Christian denominations that propose a conception of sin contrary to Augustine's doctrine of original sin is the Mennonite Church USA denomination, and Mennonite Brethren Church.[225] Both denominations reject the notion of inherited guilt, infant baptism for the remission of original sin, and instead believe individuals must choose to turn away from sin lest they imitate the error of Adam. John Toews, himself part of the Mennonite Brethren Church, argues that as Western culture continues to move towards a post-Christendom, post-denominational society, more and more "seekers," or questioning Christian's, may find the ideas presented by his denomination an attractive alternative more congruent with juridical ethics. Whether religious or

[223] *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application* (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred Productions, 2000), 45.

[224] "Article 7. Sin," Confession of Faith In a Mennonite Perspective, Mennonite Church USA, accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.mennoniteusa.org/who-are-mennonites/what-we-believe/confession-of-faith/sin/.

[225] Toews, *Story of Original Sin*, 102. Toews forgets to mention the Church of Latter-day Saints, as they too reject hereditary original sin. Pentecostal aversion to doctrinal elaboration neither refutes nor espouses original sin.

not, one's attitude toward original sin and the use and interpretation one makes of it—whether through ignorance or integration—influences the internalization of ethics in personal life and society.

In the next and final chapter, I explore how, and if, the subtle tenets of original sin continue to affect human thought patterns, self-perception, morality, and the quest for redemption and personal growth in contemporary America, with some attention to the late twentieth century. To get an inside look, I examine children's books, sermons and homilies, social media, and conduct personal interviews with a professor of behavioral psychology and evolutionary biologist. My findings reveal that the underlying principles of original sin can be seen within children's books, sermons, and even in religious education handbooks for grades K–6th, such as Catholicism's Parish School of Religion (PSR), but identifying underlying tenets of original sin in religious "nones" and the legal justice system of today's America is a more difficult enterprise. Questions I ask are: (1) How have Augustine's writings, and Pelagian events surrounding original sin and salvation shaped and influenced the minds and beliefs of Christians today in America? (2) While overtly religious moral codes may have become more diverse and secularized, do the moral underlying intuitions rooted in the idea of original sin remain prevalent?

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF 'SIN' DISCOURSE IN AMERICA (2023)

In *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* (2013), sociologist of religion, Nancy Ammerman argues that religious surveys and methodologies are failing to account for the decline in religious attendance because they isolate and reduce religious themes to simple categories for statistical analysis, which masks the complexity of the speech involved.[226] Instead, she proposes, sociologists should look to the "everyday" of religion as lived, not the papers of "hardly-read" church doctrine, to understand the shift in religious thought among Americans. If Ammerman is right, as I think she is, more subtle and creative methodologies should be entertained to inquire how Westerners devise their own consciousness of "sin" and the role of liberty in "wrongdoing." Paying attention to language and speech is another suitable methodology, according to sociologist Marsha Witten, in *All is Forgiven* (1993). Witten's work, written in the twentieth century prior to the global pandemic, examines the rhetoric employed in church sermons, which reveals a trend in contrasting outsiders as the "sinners," rather than the laypeople. Witten's work was valuable, but religious life is not confined to the pulpit. Ordinary people in the pews, and those outside of them, also have things to say.

Sociology of Original Sin

After the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War, it was evident to many Americans that sin was alive, and inescapably lurking in the morass of human endeavors. With the horrors of the war, including the Holocaust and the atom bomb, the possibility of human

[226] Nancy Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

extinction slowly entered the imaginations of American minds. Christians in America were looking for answers to the problem of evil. Protestant theologians Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Billy Graham were featured in *Time* magazine and their religious thoughts on original sin were widely publicized. American historian, Andrew Finstuen, in *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (2010), reviewed popular magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, *Christianity Today*), television programs (*Search for America*), and radio stations (New York WRVR) during this time. Finstuen discovered the discussions of original sin were not limited to clergy, or people with elevated social positions, or advanced education. Rather, "lay theologians" of all social ranks and denominations, as Finstuen terms them, took an interest in understanding the dynamics of human nature. They wrote letters to the theologians, posted theological questions on newspaper columns (e.g., *My Answer*), and attended speaking tours. Without necessarily reading theological precepts, everyday Protestants internalized a neo-orthodox doctrine of original sin through Niebuhr and Tillich, and a neo-evangelical doctrine through Graham. Their works were able to reach a combined circulation of over 20 million in America from 1940 through the early 1960s.[227] Nearly two-thirds of Americans were Protestant, and more than 90 percent of Americans believed in God in the late 1940s and 1950s.[228]

[227] Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold, Billy Graham, and Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2010), 4.

[228] Frank Newport, "Percentage of Christians in U.S. Drifting Down, but Still High," Gallup Inc., last modified December 24, 2015, www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCOURTS-ca4-15-02597/pdf/USCOURTS-ca4-15-02597-3.pdf.

For theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, sin was intrinsic to the very nature of existence, not biologically transmitted, yet therefore cannot be remedied in this finite life.[229] Niebuhr writes, human sin was "overcome by divine mercy, though man remains a sinner."[230] Paul Tillich disagrees with Augustine that humans are born guilty because of Adam's sin, but nevertheless believes existence *is* sin as such because the finite limits of human freeedom—the infinite possibilities of freedom, yet the finite limits of human mortality—will always confuse one to know how to live "correctly."[231] Still, the Christian can be freed from the power of sin for Tillich, but it is an ontological problem that only God can resolve. He writes, "One should always be conscious of the fact that 'sins' are the expressions of 'sin.'"[232] Billy Graham, Southern Baptist leader of the pan-denominational evangelical movement, believes sin is biologically transmitted—upholding an Augustinian outlook—but "sin shall not rule or dominate" for the Christian aided by grace because Jesus's death "canceled forever sins power."[233] For Tillich and Niebuhr, grace and forgiveness function in spite of sin, not as a complete erasure of them. Despite the nuances expressed by all three leaders, Augustine's influence is evident in their writings regarding their conceptions of original sin—namely, that sin is inscribed at birth.

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[229] Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 86.

[230] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1941), 62.

[231] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 236.

[232] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 46.

[233] Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 85.

The only characteristic Tillich, Niebuhr, and Graham shared in their version of original sin was it's irrevocable, or ineluctable nature (sin remains after baptism). They disagreed about total depravity, inherited guilt, prelapsarian state, and hereditary transmission. These differences matter because these three figures influenced approximately two-thirds of American citizens—including atheists—in how to conceptualize evil, the corruption of human nature, and ethics in a world after wars and famine. Christian public thinkers, more than official church doctrine or denominational creeds, were utilized to reorient the American imagination of the problem of evil and the origin of sin in the post-World War II era. Tillich was a practicing Lutheran, yet his works explicitly reject Luther's doctrine of inherited guilt and hereditary sin. Niebuhr was raised in the Evangelical Synod, which merged into the Evangelical and Reformed denomination in 1934, and later joined with the Congregationalists to form the United Church of Christ. Yet, he flatly denies the pioneer of the Reformed movement John Calvin's concept of total depravity, and hereditary transmission of sin; instead, Niebuhr claims humans are both "blind and far-seeing." Graham was a Southern Baptist evangelical, yet despite his lack of academic theological training, he believed sin was hereditary and transmitted from Adam.[234] The publicization of theology in mid-twentieth century America gradually subverted a fully Augustinian doctrine of original sin, through media and public channels, allowing Protestant laypeople to voice their questions, concerns, and opinion.

Like Finstuen, sociologist Marsha Witten provides ample evidence of the centrality of language and speech to construct, communicate ideas, and respond to social shifts in modern society. Instead of focusing on the public discourse of religious seekers in the mass media, she

[234] Billy Graham, *Peace With God* (Charlotte, NC: BGEA, 2004), 48: "We are all sinners by inheritance, and try as we will, we cannot escape our birthright."

examines the words of clergy and laypeople both in the pulpit and the pew. In *All is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism* (1993), she analyzes 47 sermons on the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) preached between 1986 and 1988, 26 sermons from Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) pastors, and 21 from Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) pastors. Her findings illustrate that "Talk about sin appear[ed] more to be setting implicit boundaries to separate insiders from outsiders who are targets, than to be articulating theological insights into the depravity of human nature."[235]

The PCUSA holds a more strict Augustinian view of original sin on paper because it affirms inherited guilt; but, in Witten's research, 75% of the SBC pastors and only 11% of the PCUSA pastors noted the universality and non-exemption of sin.[236] Witten notes reveal that SBC preachers look at sin more theologically (external actions), judging the sin of the Prodigal Son more harshly than the Presbyterian preachers, who pay attention to the self-righteous, callous, behavioral disposition of the older brother. One Presbyterian speaker concluded that "being self-centered, righteous, and unforgiving is just as sinful as waywardness and rebellion."[237] When most SBC sermons discussed sin, they used a "resistance" device, a device that deflects sin away from the listeners and associates it with outgroups. Eleven of the twenty sermons employed this device, Written writes, using "criminals, prostitutes, addicts, homosexuals, the obese" and even children, as the exemplars of sin as rebellion.[238] One SBC pastor said, "The root cause of sin is

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[235] Marsha G. Witten, *All is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 120.

[236] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 87. However, keep in mind that between 1990 and 1966, the PCUSA lost 30 percent of its membership due to conflict between conservative and liberal sects.

[237] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 86.

[238] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 92.

the rebelliousness that young people display against their parents."[239] By locating sin in adolescents, the pastors promote the idea that sin is inherited at birth, but without describing their listeners as sinful (unless adolescents are present for the sermon). The most common device used by Presbyterian pastors, however, was "therapeutic tolerance," a euphemism that immoral behavior is something attained or learned rather than endowed at birth. The younger brother is seeking "acceptance and approval" because the older brother does not give him those benefits, so he "can at least get some attention by rebelling," one Presbyterian pastor said.[240] Another frequent device among both SBC and PCUSA clergy was "mitigation," when the force of the character's sinfulness is weakened. For example, when the Southern Baptist pastor asked the audience to examine themselves to see if they resemble the older brother, the pastor provided an explanation for the brother's behavior: "We could diagnose [the older brother] as being narcissistic…he has a grandiose sense of self-importance, and exaggerates his achievements."[241] By doing so, the diagnosis preempts any identification by the audience with the older brother. Here, we can see original sin is directed more towards non-believers than believers. This ironically aligns more with Pelagius's belief that Christians are no longer sinners, but saints, despite the church doctrine of PCUSA and SBC suggesting otherwise.

Witten's findings reveal that even Reformed churches mitigate, tolerate, and deflect the word "sin" in the sermons since, she writes, the rhetoric of the PCUSA pastors often assumed "that human beings lack control over their behavior when it comes to their inherited tendency to

[239] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 90.

[240] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 99.

[241] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 96.

sin."[242] Witten's point is that because the Augustinian doctrine of original sin has been accepted by most popular churches in America, yet they avoid discussing it in sermons, those outside the church in American society have nevertheless internalized the word "sin" as a religious term. A term connotating a degenerate, corrupt state that is innate and unfixable, since the sermons direct the guilt of sin towards outsiders, but not insiders. Paradoxically, those outside the church are more frequently associated with Augustine's original sin (not the idea of original sin but original sin itself) than those in the pews; the sermons portray those outside of the church as more captive to original sin. The majority of the sermons in churches who doctrinally espouse Augustine's original sin, only impute the guilt of sin towards those who are not attending church. This indirectly contradicts Augustine's belief that even believers are sinners and equally worthy of damnation.

Theologian Alistair McFayden, in *Bound to Sin* (2000), conversely argues the use of sin-language in the West "has fallen into disuse in general public (but also in much Christian and theological) discourse as a language for talking about the pathological in human affairs" because it fails to incite change and by failing has been replaced with terms more indicative of human aspirations such as self-help books and motivational videos on social media.[243] After all, if sin is understood as an unchangeable condition of human nature without God's grace, those who are not religious, yet are seeking advice to find direction and success in life, will resort to other sources for personal change. Sociologist James Hunter documents the tendency to downplay

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[242] Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 89.

[243] Alistair McFayden, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3; see also, Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 83: all SBC pastors in her analysis emphasize the younger brother's *conscious* rebellion from the will of his father, not a misguided lack of knowledge.

notions of sin yet, highlight forgiveness and conversion.[244] If this happens, according to world-renowned psychiatrist Karl Menninger's prediction in the 1980s, the word "sin" will be replaced with words like "illness," "fragmentation," and "dysfunction," where crimes will become pardoned as deterministic abnormalities. That is, if sin is understood in an Augustinian framework by society at large.[245] Instead, Menninger, now deceased, believed sin would be better understood as implying change, not preventing it. He writes, "There is immorality; there is unethical behavior; there is wrong doing. And I hope to show that there is usefulness in retaining the concept."[246] For example, "calling something a 'sin' and dealing with it as such may be a useful salvage or coping device" because the term "illness" excludes moral responsibility. "It does little good to repent a symptom,"[247] he writes, a surprising allusion to Pelagius's saying, "To call a person to something he considers impossible to achieve does him no good."[248] He argues that groupthink and group irresponsibility are the main causes for ecological dilemmas, statutory crime, and greed, but concludes that "if there is more awareness, more sense of responsibility in the world today, there will be less self-destructive behavior."[249] Menninger makes a great point. The more people consider human error as ineluctable disorders, as Augustine's doctrine of original sin implies, the more humanity denies a step towards change for

[244] James Hunter, *American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 91–99.

[245] Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Random House, 1988), 19.

[246] Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 46.

[247] Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 48.

[248] Pelagius, "Letter to Demetrias," in *Theological Anthropology*, 40–1.

[249] Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 177.

improvement, both in society and the individual. Since all world dilemmas begin as internal, personal moral problems and are transformed into social, legal, or environmental complexities, determining the influence of Augustine's doctrine of original sin in American society today is more important than one might generally assume. Rather than reinvent the word "sin," and only perpetuate religious turmoil and misunderstanding, Menninger justly calls "for the revival of personal responsibility in all human acts. Not total responsibility, but not zero either."[250] There is both choice and compulsion, and for Menninger they are not mutually exclusive.

The interplay between morality and "sin" has been heavily disputed since the fourth century CE. The ambiguous nature of the word "sin" may be the cause of its jocular connotation today, as Menninger argues: for some sin is an admission to "messing up," to others an admission of *being* "messed up." Additionally, cross-disciplinary research between theology of "sin" and psychology is nearly obsolete.

As we can see, determining the level of influence and adoption of Augustine's doctrine of original sin purely through existent literature surrounding sin and American culture is dubious. Menninger internalizes a view of sin contrary to Augustine, despite being engrained in American culture, and Witten notices the sermons of churches who favor an Augustinian framework to "mitigate" the discussion of sinfulness, directing sin and guilt toward the pews. Meanwhile, Finstuen's work uncovers a major influence of Augustine's doctrine of original sin on American Protestants. But what do scientists and psychologists think about sin *today*? To recall Ammerman's emphasis on the necessity of examining the "lived religion" of citizens, I will talk to two experts, and review other contemporary material, to see how Americans discuss original sin in today's world. This approach goes beyond academic literature, providing firsthand

[250] Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 178.

perspectives and nuances that might otherwise be missed in a purely theoretical analysis. It helps capture the evolving cultural, emotional, and personal dimensions of religious beliefs, resulting in a more accurate portrayal of how original sin is discussed in contemporary America.

Talking About Original Sin: Qualitative Interviews

Due to the scant cross-disciplinary work on "sin" and psychology in the twenty-first century—despite the majority of people in America believing in such things as right and wrong—I decided to conduct two interviews, one with an evolutionary biologist, and one with a behavioral psychologist, to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary discourse surrounding original sin and its relevance within American society. The purpose of these two interviews was to elucidate potential evolutionary and psychological underpinnings of moral inclinations and explicate the implications of such origins on the understanding of original sin. The interviews also help enrich our comprehension of original sin's complex role in modern American thought.

The nature of the questions revolve around how each expert conceives the origins and causes of socially unacceptable behavior and immoral actions, and the level of volition involved in the manner of transgressive behavior. I examine whether or not Augustine's "original sin" aligns with the ways that social and natural scientists talk about human behavior. The four main questions I asked each expert were: (1) Do we inherit moral traits from our parents? If so, how much? (2) How much volition participates in making moral decisions? (3) How do you define evil, immoral actions, ("sin"), or the lack thereof respective to your specialized field? (4) How much are our environment, genetics, conscientiousness, or combination of each, responsible for our behavior and actions? The two interviews lasted a little more than one hour. Occasionally, I

would focus on specific questions special to their field to capture underlying, more complex details that contribute to their viewpoint.

While a sample size of two experts might seem small in comparison to larger-scale studies, it still holds significant value for many reasons: (1) Their perspectives can yield insight into how different segments of professional fields perceive and engage with the concept of original sin, and can serve as foundational pillars upon which a broader understanding can be built. (2) In-depth interviews with a limited number of experts allow for deeper exploration of their viewpoints, theories, and research findings. (3) Academic experts possess authoritative insights that can highlight key trends, historical shifts, and emerging perspectives related to original sin that might be obscured in broader surveys. (4) Lastly, my findings merely serve as a starting point and framework for future, larger-scale research from which insights and themes can be derived from these interviews.

The two interviews were conducted with faculty at Missouri State University (see Appendix). The first was with behavioral psychologist Dr. Amber Abernathy, Mary-Charlotte Bayles Shealy Chair in Conscientious Psychology at Missouri State University. Her work delves into the psychological dimensions of sin, analyzing its impact on individual psyche and behavior. She channels her responses towards how cognitive processes and socio-cultural influences shape how individuals perceive wrongdoing and "sin" in the modern era. The second expert, Jaxon Priest, got his masters in evolutionary biology at Missouri State University, where he now works as a lab technician. He approaches the interview through the lens of evolutionary biology and neuro-zoology to investigate the evolutionary origins of moral concepts and the role they play in locating the potential mode of free will in behavioral actions.

I interviewed Abernathy in her office at Hill Hall on March 28, 2023, located on the Missouri State University (MSU) campus. Abernathy received her PhD in Experimental Psychology in 2015 at Oklahoma State University. She teaches child and adolescent psychology, specializing in conscientiousness, enhancing personality traits, and psychophysiology. With her permission, I audio recorded the interview, and began asking how she might define free will, immoral actions ("sin"), and hereditary traits related to Augustine's concept of "hereditary sin," and a weakened free will. Abernathy told me that her psychologist colleagues are divided in the debate over free will versus determinism. Some believe in the power of free choice to overcome environmental predispositions, whether through psychiatric treatment or an "internal compass." She went on to say other psychologists believe behavioral traits are genetically and environmentally determined.

Similar to what Menninger believed, Abernathy is a "compatibilist," endorsing the belief that free will, in the sense required for moral responsibility, is consistent with universal causal determinism. She says, "biology and evolution predisposes us to do these things [prescribed actions], choice still plays a big role."[251] Abernathy's point is that a person does not have destructive behavior solely because they have low levels of serotonin, nor because they solely chose to steal; rather, the former catalyzes the impulse to act, and the latter chooses to act on the impulse. Both influence the other, causing the action. It is half-submerged personal responsibility, and half-submerged environmental and genetic determinants. Abernathy defines free will intuitively throughout the interview as the ability to choose to do otherwise, or veto an action. She indirectly references a 2016 study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of America* (PNAS), where researchers in Berlin discovered that someone's

[251] Amber Abernathy, interview by author, Missouri State University, March 28, 2023.

"readiness potential" (i.e., after it can be seen that the brain has started preparing for the action), can still be vetoed after unconscious, electrical activity within the prefrontal cortex prepares to act.[252] At this point in the interview, I asked about people who are born into an environment where society tells them that what is "good" is actually harmful and fatal, and conversely what is "bad" is really prosperous and free. Using this example, I ask Abernathy if it is possible for a child raised in an unhealthy, toxic environment, whose parents and friends may agree with society's moral standards, to somehow, as they get older, internally recognize that society's moral standards conflict with their own. Her short answer is yes, they can evolve, but to answer, she references psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's (1927–1987) "Stages of Moral Development." His work suggests individuals progress through three main levels—pre-conventional (self-interest and obedience), conventional (social conformity and maintaining order), and post-conventional (personal ethics and social contract). Each level contains two sub-stages (six stages total), to reach higher levels of moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. The sixth stage is called "universal ethical principal orientation," which is, in Abernathy's words, "when your own internal beliefs and rules go against often societal expectations."[253] She says the sixth stage is where the child would be able to dissent from the views of his/her friends, family, and society, whose values are misguided. She gives the example of people's varying views about America's involvement in the Vietnam War, and subsequent protests against the conflict in 1975. People began to protest against the 55% of Americans (110,000,000 US citizens) who agreed with

[252] Matthias Schultze-Kraft, et al., "The Point of No Return in Vetoing Self-Initiated Movements," *PNAS* 113, no. 4 (December 2015): 1080-1085. doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1513569112.

[253] Abernathy, interview.

"dynamiting innocent people, or it's a lesser sin to avoid a greater one,"[254] in the words of Menninger. Conversely, a smaller group within society protested against the policies of the U.S. government (Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon administrations), claiming America's involvement in the conflict immoral and wrong. Abernathy's answer to my original nature versus nature question, and her statement regarding the Vietnam War protesters, defies reducing human behavior strictly to genetics. She concludes saying, "There has to be some sort of internal compass that's not necessarily biological because people will turn against their family and say, 'I strongly believe 'this,' and it's not friends telling them either, so I would have to say there is a third variable."[255] By saying this, Abernathy suggests that environment and genetics, nature and nurture, are not the only determining causes for human action and personality; there is also individual moral development, i.e., free will, responsible for decision-making. From a religious standpoint, this 'third variable,' Abernathy says, "would get into things possible like the Holy Spirit."[256] When Abernathy said this, I was shocked. Not only does Abernathy concede to a third variable for internal beliefs to influence decision-making, but psychologically situates the third variable where Christians might ascribe how the "Holy Spirit" directly influences their life-choices. Her view of the human psyche allows for the possibility that people might internalize the Holy Spirit as a form of rebellion. Her statement could support Paul's notion that the Holy Spirit is capable of liberating those once "enslaved to the elemental powers of the world" (Gal. 4:3).

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[254] Menninger, *Whatever Happened to Sin?*, 16.

[255] Abernathy, interview.

[256] Abernathy, interview.

Many evolutionary biologists might criticize Abernathy's emphasis on free will, undermining the massive role heredity and genes play in decision-making. However, she concedes choosing occupations has a massive biological component, perhaps even greater than one's environment.[257] In other words, there is less free will than one might think when picking, for example, a career, since one's personality is mostly shaped by genetics and their environment.

According to the Big Five personality traits, personality has a 20-60% heritability rate, with the remaining being environmental, meaning little, if any, aspect of one's personality is shaped unhindered by the outside world, Abernathy says. For example, conscientiousness, one of the Big Five Personality Traits, responsible for discipline, work ethic, organization, and dutifulness, has a 40% heritability rate, and 60% environmental rate. In other words, someone with a higher conscientiousness might have a stronger degree of accomplishing one's goals/desires, and therefore free will, than someone with lower conscientiousness.

Abernathy conducted a study to see if one could change their personality, specifically if one could increase their conscientiousness by sheer diligence. She established a five-week plan, called "behavioral activation," where students wrote down their big goals, small goals, and tasks to complete, with no reward component. Results showed that "it actually changed their personality components after the five-weeks," she said.[258] By saying this, Abernathy attests to the role genes play in establishing personality traits, but also acknowledges the role of an environment that encourages discipline. Environments can alter or "enhance" personality traits

[257] Thomas Bouchard and Matt McGue, "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Human Psychological Differences," *J Neurobiol* 54, no. 1 (2003): 4-45, doi:10.1002/neu.10160.

[258] Abernathy, interview.

and hence modify genetic institutions. Her answers revealed to me how integral having a model or blueprint to imitate can be to modifying primal habits and character transformation. The last example she gave to support how certain behaviors incited by genetic predispositions can be upended, is by utilizing behavioral therapy. She said, "genetics put us in what is called a range reaction." She goes on to explain how antisocial behavior has a genetic component, and it can be put in a range between a numerical scale of one-to-ten, but "environment, therapy, training, can move someone who was at a number nine, for example, to a seven."[259] She also mentions how repeated meditation, mindfulness, and other contemplative practices can lead to less negative responses of arousal and furor.

Abernathy's answers implicitly criticize both Pelagius and Augustine's view of human nature. That is to say, humans are not born in a morally blank slate, as Pelagius believed; rather, some people have more predispositions towards socially unacceptable behavior than others. On the other hand, moral traits are not fully determined through hereditary transmission, as Augustine believed; rather, some people need more behavioral training and environmental discipline than others. The majority consensus among psychology and philosophy scholars today is that unconscious urges, environmental conditions, and genetic determinants comprise the majority of motivation and impetus for decision-making. However, the decision to *act* on these impulses is a choice as evidenced by enhanced personality studies. The prefrontal cortex acts as an "internal compass," and through psychological treatment, reconstructive intervention on genetic and environmental determinants has shown to be possible through psychiatric and psychological treatments.[260] Daniel Dennett, contemporary American philosopher and cognitive

[259] Abernathy, interview.

[260] Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 79.

scientist, referred to as one of the "Four Horsemen of New Atheism," agrees with Abernathy and Menninger, that free will is compatible with determinism and neuroscience.[261]

Abernathy's case studies and Menninger's examples challenge the previous claims of Benjamin Libet and B. F. Skinner that "even what is voluntary behavior is completely determined, i.e., 'predetermined,'" as well as Augustine's view of selective "predestination" and the will to only choose evil.[262] To summarize Abernathy's view, no behavior is entirely involuntary or entirely voluntary, but updated rational strictures adapted to environmental social mores can be consistent with individual formative ideals.

While the debate continues, Menninger and Abernathy's research demonstrates that human beings, the legal justice system of America, and mainstream health corporations operate and function *as if* there is free will. In fact, medical and legal ethics cling to the veracity of such a presupposition. As recent journal *BMC Medical Ethics* reports, "Obtaining the patient's informed consent is not only a legal prerequisite. Beyond that, it is considered a moral duty because it reflects the healthcare professionals' respect for personal autonomy and the individual's right to self-determination."[263] If free-will is really an illusory device for decision-making capacities, as Libet believes, then the philosophy of American ethics that grounds its pursuit for "liberty and justice for all" collapses. These findings serve an important reminder that key concepts of our practical life, such as free will and wrongdoing, are influenced by

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[261] Daniel Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (London: W.W. Norton, 2014), 355.

[262] B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

[263] T. Zürcher, B. Elger, and M. Trachsel, "The Notion of Free Will and Its Ethical Relevance for Decision-Making Capacity," *BMC Medical Ethics* 20, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-019-0371-0.

metaphysical assumptions. Moreover, Augustine's doctrine of original sin has major ethical implications for today when it comes to locating causes for acting on urges that deviate from societal norms.

For Freud, integrating these unconscious sexual urges of the unconscious mind into everyday life is inspired by Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution. From this perspective, survival and reproduction are the two main factors guiding the human into action and decision—what Freud calls "self-preservation, aggression, and sexual drives"—not personal growth or societal improvement. As the scientific method advanced in the twentieth century under the experimental models of Wilhelm Wundt and the Gestalt field theory of Kurt Lewin, criminal behavior in adults was increasingly viewed as symptomatic of an underlying pathology, one which the offender was not entirely to be blamed.[264] To assess whether this crypto-Augustinian view is still held among scientists today, I interviewed post-graduate evolutionary biologist Jaxon Priest on February 28, 2023, on the campus of Missouri State University, where he works as a lab technician for the Biology department.

Charles Darwin's work, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), proposed that life evolved through a process of natural selection. Favorable variations are preserved over time, and unfavorable ones are destroyed in the struggle for existence, a process involving common ancestry and novel speciation. Some Christians in America believed Darwin's theory posed a risk for faith, whereas others, such as Simon Conway Morris, found Darwin's monophyletic theory for all plant and animal life originating through common descent "by means of divinely ordained natural laws," proof for God's presence. One example for Morris that proves "divinely ordained natural laws" is how many features of organisms have evolved several times

[264] Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 43.

independently of each other in nature. For example, the eye. This theory is known as the "convergence theory," and is often used to demonstrate that the processes of evolution are teleological (focused on an end, i.e., human consciousness). Thus, past historical atrocities that occurred were necessary for the production of a higher good. Conversely, if natural selection is not teleological, then morality is random, subjective, and dependent on the production of society.

When asking Jaxon Priest his thoughts on convergence proving a sense of purposive telos in evolution, he sided with the latter, stating, "There's not a set pattern [in evolution], but in each organism there are certain genetic mutations that will happen pre-programmed where instances will happen if conditions are met."[265] In other words, the fact that many organisms share physical characteristics such as eyes is due to both species' niches requiring sight for survival and reproduction, not because evolution has a "final cause," culminating in human consciousness. So, when I asked Jaxon what kind of a God would be consistent with the findings of natural selection, he leaned towards a God more Deistic and less moral, saying,

> Darwin mentioned this about parasitic wasps and caterpillars…parasitic wasps will lay eggs on a caterpillar and then the wasps' larvae will burrow into the caterpillar and eat its guts; some of them will even produce hormones to keep the caterpillar alive and eating more and more to delay metamorphosis into a butterfly so that they can harvest more resources from that caterpillar. So it's like, why would an all-good, all-kind God create a wasp that solely preys on the babies of a beautiful butterfly…Biology makes it hard to reconcile with that kind of God.[266]

[265] Jaxon Priest, interview by author, Missouri State University, February 28, 2023.

[266] Priest, interview.

Morality cannot be a teleological end for evolution, for Priest; but after saying this I shared with him a quote by Charles Darwin, which expresses Darwin's own reaction to discovering how mankind *ascended* from animals. In his essay, written after publishing *Origin of Species*, Darwin comments on the work saying, "Death, famine, rapine, and the concealed war of nature" bring about "the highest good which we can conceive, the creation of the higher animals…The existence of such laws should exalt our notion of the power of the omniscient Creator."[267] The fascinating aspect of evolution lies in its ability to illustrate how seemingly negative events, such as death and famine, have played pivotal roles in driving the emergence of higher forms of life. For Darwin, this is evidence of a higher guiding force. Priest was surprised Darwin said this but reiterated the lack of a conscious moral code in non-humanoid species as sufficient to cast doubt on the influence of imbued morality on the process of evolution. Priest has a point: the answers of morality cannot arise from the data of biological science, because a scientific understanding of evolution focuses primarily on the mechanisms of natural selection and adaptation, not its purpose of direction.

Priest discusses how the process of evolution, driven by natural selection, is a process that produces seemingly designed outcomes specific to what an animal requires for survival. In that sense, evolution is not random, but determined by mutation, selection, and genetic variation. Congruent with Augustine and Benjamin Libet's hard determinism, Jaxon says from a biological-evolutionary perspective, "It's pretty hardcore deterministic. It's not all nature—it's a lot of nurture, too—but you're not really in charge of your nurture, so personally I sympathize a lot with hard determinism," he concludes.

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[267] Charles Darwin, *The Foundations of the Origin of Species: Two Essays Written in 1842 and 1844*, ed. Francis Darwin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 51–2.

After he sided with hard determinism—the belief that there is no free will, and everything is pre-determined—I wanted to see how he navigated certain ethical dilemmas. I asked Priest if hardcore determinism should be adopted by the legal justice system of America, since he believes it is more scientifically accurate. His answer was "No," because of the "makeshift feeling of free will" posing a legitimate appearance in the human life.[268] "Free will certainly feels real," he reiterated. The "third level"—beyond environment and genetics—of free will both within and without nature, which Abernathy so emphatically espouses, is nowhere apparent in Priest's thought process. "It's very hard," he reiterates, "to become a better person if everyone around you is just 'crabs in a bucket.'" The phrase Priest uses here is an analogy to how a person of a collective tribe cannot rise above the group's suffering because a member of the tribe will pull them back into the collective demise, as crabs do in a bucket. Nevertheless, Priest, a hard determinist, and Abernathy, a compatibilist, mutually discredit the Augustinian view that morality, or the lack thereof to be precise, is the causal production of a "penalty imposed on Adam."[269] Yet, to some degree they both indirectly affirm the Pauline view that "elemental powers of the world" (Gal. 4:3), that is, the environment (nurture), constrict a person's optimal growth and pursuit of conscientiousness and freedom.

At the end of the interview, Priest speaks about his former religious background and its juxtaposition with his current scientific beliefs: "It's evident to me that we don't really have that much free will, but if I'm speaking religiously, if I were speaking as a Christian, I'm like Free Will Baptist, then I think Calvinists are weird for thinking that a preordained amount of people

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[268] Priest, interview.

[269] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 2*, trans. M. Boulding, The Works of St Augustine 3.16 (New York: New City, 2000), 148.

are going to hell—but determinism in a biological sense makes a lot of sense."[270] He admits, "it's a very strong cognitive dissonance," as he was raised Free Will Baptist, but he acquiesces to accepting that dissonance because ascribing all the "horrors" of natural selection to a higher ordained power is equally as odd to him.

Priest is content with confirming the deadly journey of survival of the fittest to a naturalistic framework. Priest's biological leanings support a deterministic, amoral view of the world. He believes that free will appears real but is ultimately illusory insofar as a person's desire to change themselves infers a prior predisposition to want to change or see a therapist. Because individuals are not in control of their nurture, the construction of morality, ethics, and free will are all contingent on the societal strictures of the individual's habitat.

Science versus Religion?

The controversy between science and religion in relation to the doctrine of original sin initially seems like a minor problem. Augustine, for example, strenuously warned against promoting interpretations of the Bible which contradict what is known from science, lest intelligent people find Christianity repulsive. For example, Augustine believed interpreting Genesis 1-3 as literal history might repel people from the faith.[271] Niebuhr, Calvin, and Tillich also favored a metaphorical reading of the Garden of Eden. Yet, all of these theologians believed sin became a reality because of Adam ("man"). However, polygenism (the belief that our ancestors stem from multiple different gene pools and not one couple) could devalue the

[270] Priest, interview.

[271] David Lindberg and Gary Ferngren, "Early Christian Attitudes toward Nature," in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Ferngren (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 42.

Traducian argument that sin is sexually transmitted, and potentially even Paul's argument that "all are in Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22). However, the consensus among the modern scientific community favors "monophyletic polygenism" (a first community of homo sapiens rather than a first couple), due to genetic studies tracing the genetic diversity of Homo sapiens to a single African origin, known as the "Out of Africa" hypothesis.[272] There is growing evidence for monophyletic polygenism; this potentially poses a major issue for religious councils and denominations that endorse or presume a Traducian view, such as the Council of Trent (1511–1514). For example, the encyclical of Pope Pius XII claims that if polygenism were true, original sin would be impossible to "reconcile with what the sources of revealed truth and…the ecclesiastical Magisterium teach about original sin."[273] Clearly, a revised and updated view of original sin is needed by religious denominations, lest a continual divide between doctrine and doctor, clergy and citizen, persist in the corridors of American thought.

As recent research has shown in *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think* (2010), conducted by Elaine Howard Ecklund, over fifty percent of the 1,750 scientists surveyed were not religious, but nearly fifty percent were.[274] A near-perfect gap is a perfect representation of the divide between choice and compulsion, sin and symptom, by American citizens today. Joel—whose full name is disclosed in the interview—is a science professor at an elite university yet is also religious. He said in the interview led by Elaine Howard Ecklund, "When you are

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[272] Saioa López, Lucy van Dorp, and G. Hellenthal, "Human Dispersal Out of Africa: A Lasting Debate," *Evol Bioinform* 11, no. 2 (2016): 57–68, https://doi.org/10.4137/EBO.S33489.

[273] Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hunermann (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012), 3987.

[274] Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27.

teaching your Christian thinkers…a lot of students will be turned off or they will have an image in their heads of what Christianity means based on some of the more vocal proponents of Christianity today."[275] To combat this, Joel continues, "I always have to talk about the ideas of original sin and redemption."[276] Joel not only locates the importance of the story of Adam and Eve for Christian persuasion, but notices how the mis-portrayed conceptions of the story is a main reason for dismissiveness by his students. After all, the desire to be healed requires believing one is injured. Therefore, knowing that Paul understood sin as environmental pressures, and exploitative powers in political, celestial, and social spheres ("rulers and authorities" in Col. 2:15; cf., Mt. 4:8), and not a transmitted germ one is guilty of upon birth, may assist in American scientists ceasing to see religion, or Christianity at least, as irrational, a potential threat to universities, and contrary to everyday commonsense.[277]

Roman Catholicism's desire to remain congruent with contemporary scientific findings, and its insistence on defending the historical doctrine of original sin, puts the Church in a sticky situation, sociologically speaking. As we have seen, sections in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nn. 374–379, 390, 399–407) still construe monogenism as a basic premise of original sin by saying sin is "passed on." Equally noteworthy, Catholic Parish Schools of Religion (PSR), which provide catechetical instruction to children and youth attending public school, teach young students the story of original sin. For instance, one workbook that St. Claire of Assisi Catholic Church uses, "Christ Reveals God's Mystery" (2014), was officially declared free from doctrinal or *moral errors* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the

[275] Ecklund, *What Scientists Really Think*, 73–4.

[276] Ecklund, *What Scientists Really Think*, 74.

[277] Ecklund, *What Scientists Really Think*, 105.

archdiocese of St. Louis (*Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*). This text teaches students to internalize a more Thomist (Thomas Aquinas), than Augustinian view, of original sin, saying, "the first humans, Adam and Eve, lost that state of 'original justice' [natural relationship with God] not only for themselves but for all human beings."[278] The students are taught their individual relationship with God is broken, not because they knowingly and freely rejected God, but because Adam and Eve sinned against God. John Hardon's *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (1980) elaborates, "Had Adam not sinned, original justice would have been transmitted to all his descendants."[279] In teaching a nascent, subtle form of Traducianism to Catholic students, personal responsibility for relational faults and love for people and God as a natural impulse are potentially diminished and displaced from the student's mind. Consequently, moral causes are inferred to a distant primordial man named Adam, not presented as Paul teaches it: an external power that permeates human politics and society since the beginning of humanity. As a result of this luring power, Paul believes, people opt to sin. Conversely, Jesus, born under this power of sin, did not succumb to it, but defeated it through crucifying the flesh, the source of sin's receptivity, so that all who believe might live free from sin's rule, and into the perfection God has called them to freely achieve through experience and baptism into the Spirit.

A Pauline view of sin is more apparent in non-religious children's books, such as *Top Ten Bible Stories* 1998), published by Scholastic Inc., but the message is still unclear. In the story, Adam and Eve are real people who caused "The Fall," but "evil is in the world because of

[278] "Christ Reveals God's Mystery," Be My Disciples (Mission Hills, CA: RCL Publishing, 2014), 52.

[279] John Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 395.

the way humans behave."[280] Less stress is laid upon Adam and Eve for the cause of evil and sin in the world today, and the Fall of Adam and Eve remains ambiguously linked to the origin of evil perpetuated by human behavior. In both examples, Catholic workbooks and Scholastic children's books, the soft-pedaling of original sin shows that the clergy and laypeople who wrote these workbooks most likely are aware of the discrepancy. Pope John Paul II, for example, propounds Creationism (that each individual soul was conceived by God), and not the parents (i.e., "Traducianism"), to mitigate the quandary between recent scientific findings on monophyletic polygenism and hereditary sin.[281] John Toews, professor of theology and a practicing Mennonite, is all too aware of the ethical dangers in using sin language to signify ontological deformities.[282] The drive for empirical knowledge by modern scientists forces theologians who endorse original sin, like John Paul II, into deeper reflection and modification of how to explain what Christ did to save the entire human race from "Sin." It is time, for the sake of American society and Western Christian ethics, to move past Augustine and envision Sin less as an internal hereditary germ and more as a transpersonal and structural power that has the world and humans in its grip. From the beginning, all are seduced by these powers, or choose to succumb to these powers.

The purpose of this chapter was to explore how Augustine's doctrine of original sin impacts the way people in America today understand sin or simply avoid using the word altogether. The findings both challenge and support my previous findings on Paul and Augustine.

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[280] Michael Coleman, "Top Ten Bible Stories," illus. Michael Tickner (New York: Scholastic, 1998), 18.

[281] John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997).

[282] Toews, *The Story of Original Sin*, 108.

Existing research on the sociology of sin by American sociologists, though scant, normally present one of two arguments. The first argues for convincing evidence that belief in Augustinian anthropology has not dwindled, but further solidified into the subconscious of American Christians today. Other scholars, however, contend that contemporary American culture has internalized certain facets of Augustinian anthropology by American churches, but this belief is reduced, neglected, and avoided by media, sermons, websites, and lay citizens. My own sociological findings suggest, not definitively of course, that both arguments may be true: sin as sexually transmitted germ struggles to be adopted by the post-Christendom West of the twenty-first century, yet certain elements of Augustine's doctrine, such as the prelapsarian state, and sin as an ontological-moral fault, are evident in the writings of religious and non-religious Americans. Emphasizing personal responsibility and free will in the discussion of sin may theoretically assist in the reintegration of moral responsibility, compassion, and care in American society. However, the word "sin" appears inextricably tied to an Augustinian doctrine of original sin, making such a transmutation hardly conceivable—and probably for the better. As such, I believe that the doctrine of original sin can be further illumined and revised through the natural sciences despite its potential to deconstruct the modern beliefs of religious tradition. In this way, a commonality between genetic predispositions and original sin—of biology and religion—can be posited insofar as both claim certain behavioral and mental traits may be inherited and affect individuals during their lifetime.

CONCLUSION

Whoever successfully bridges the gap between free will and determinism has either deceived the entire world, or convinced only themselves. Consequently, it is not my intention to decide whether original sin precludes choice or compulsion, but only to reveal the ethical and societal importance in understanding the historical complexity of the doctrine, and how Paul's thought became conflated with Augustine's doctrine of original sin, and impacted American history, politics, and structural systems. We are in history, not above it; contemporary American culture is pluralistic, and we should expect no different when it comes to the various views expressed by both religious and secular fields on the idea of original sin. Contemporary psychology's viability for therapeutic improvement, Paul's conception of Sin as external power, and the legal court system of voluntary culpability, leans toward a Pelagian position, favoring a voluntary view of human decision and its power to reconstruct injurious environment and genetic strictures. However, contemporary evolutionary biology, Paul's denigration of the "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), and the penal substitution of the legal court system, indicates an Augustinian view of moral banality and punitive punishment. The oscillation between illness and crime, sin and symptom, and choice and compulsion within the court system of America is a striking example of the current dissension between compulsion and free will among scholars and laypeople today on original sin. Skeptics of free will are spreading in contemporary America. The number of court cases, for example, that use neuroscientific findings to argue the defendant did not freely choose to act on the crime, has more than doubled in the past decade.[283]

[283] Darby Aono, Gideon Yaffe, and Hedy Kober, "Neuroscientific Evidence in the Courtroom: A Review," *Cognitive Research* 4, no. 40 (2019): https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-019-0179-y.

If Augustine understood sin (*hamartia* in Romans 5:12) as a cosmic-personal force, and not an individual-internal substance, would America be in the situation it is today? Being born sinful without choice, free only to choose evil, is not just an Augustinian issue, it's a scientific, psychological, and ethical issue. For instance, a court system in America determines whether a crime is a crime on the basis of free choice by the suspect (e.g., *mens rea*). Paul, the one who supplied the roots for the doctrine of original sin, viewed sin as a power within the world, not within the human *per se*. Humans are in the world, and thus affected by the destructive powers of the world, such as natural disasters, trauma, opioid crises, environmental corruption, and political group think. The colloquial phrase, "We live in a fallen world," is not far off the mark in this context. While Paul believes all of humanity are born, in some sense, "disobedient" and in moral disarray (Rom. 11:32; cf., Eph. 2:3), it is only so that the opposite—obedience and conscientiousness—could be freely chosen through maturity and the power of the Spirit of Christ.

Like evolution, the process of natural selection begins in chaos and unforgiving deaths and sacrifices, but as it progresses through time, intelligibility gradually emerges through advanced adaptations in creatures required for survival. It is a similar logic to Paul's *a minori ad maius* argument that we are born in an "amateur" level, because if everyone was born an expert (i.e., born already saved), then the word "expert" would lose its meaning. It's not that people can only be saved if others are not saved, but that the choice not to be saved would be exempt if salvation were imputed at birth. Rather, we are what a child heir is to a dying king, Paul says: "though they are the owners of all the property," i.e., not born unfree, "they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father," i.e., because they are not mature or old enough to govern the possessions under rule (Gal. 4:1-2). "So with us; while we were minors, we

were enslaved to the elemental principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come…God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:3-4, 6). While humans are not born unfree and irretrievably connected to evil conduct and wrong doing—owners of all the property—the celestial powers, principles, and spirits of the world inaugurated by Adam and the serpent, leads all humans to live *as if* they are born unfree and cleaved to sin.

According to behavioral psychology, people are born with unequal dispositions of destructive behavior, both through genetics and being raised by parents or in environments with low conscientiousness, mistreatment, and a lack of love (nature and nurture). However, helping and listening to those less fortunate, and walking alongside them, can cause an increase in conscientiousness and upend recidivism. Similarly, for Paul, all are "in Adam" genetically sharing in mortality, and are environmentally born in a world under the power of Sin, but through "bear[ing] one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), and "love[ing] one another" (Rom. 13:8), not only does this "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), but it enables one to "not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind," (Rom. 12:2, NET). Not only is this way of looking at Sin a more accurate representation of Paul's cosmology, but it creates points of reference among contemporary fields in psychology and science, and fosters a deeper moral impetus for helping those less fortunate. Critics of Pelagius are right to argue that if original sin was caused by man, then man can also, by his own doing—and thus without Christ—undo the sin and choose redemption and salvation. However, this fails to incorporate the nuance of Paul's cosmology. Namely, that Sin is a cosmic power beyond man's ability to defeat alone without God's help, yet Sin was catalyzed by Adam's transgression. God's grace to merit salvation does not contradict man's choice to become Christian; rather, they work compatibly.

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APPENDIX

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2023 4:09 PM
To: Schmalzbauer, John A <JSchmalzbauer@MissouriState.edu>
Subject: IRB-FY2023-423 - Initial: Initial Approval

Missouri State
UNIVERSITY

To:
John Schmalzbauer
Religious Studies

RE: Notice of IRB Approval
Submission Type: Initial
Study #: IRB-FY2023-423
Study Title: From Where Does Evil Come?: A Critique and Examination on the Evolution of Original Sin
Decision: Approved

Approval Date: March 20, 2023

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:
PI: John Schmalzbauer
Co-PI:
Primary Contact: John Schmalzbauer
Other Investigators: Matthew Wynn