



2: "Mankind requires salvation."

This may be the most controlling of all "The Most Insidious Lies," as it takes all power away from the individual and gives it to the church/priest. Essentially, it says that all people were born defective in the eyes of their Creator, and there is nothing they can do on their own to make up for their deficiencies, except to beg forgiveness and do whatever their religion dictates.

Even though it is preposterous on its surface, this lie is so ingrained in our society that its negative influence has continued unabated for many millennia.

The text below sheds some light on the origins of "original sin," and then considers the fruits of our personal transgressions.

Every culture has a creation myth, except the Judeo-Christian culture ... it has two creation myths. The earliest is told in Genesis 2 through 4. The other was picked up later and tacked on to the front of the Old Testament, as Genesis 1.

Some claim, and the ignorant sometimes believe, that the two stories can be reconciled one to the other, but that is impossible. Consider that in the first account God made the animals before he made humans (both male and female simultaneously),¹ while in the second account God is said to have made man (male only) first, then the animals, and then woman.²

Both stories contain many outrages to astronomy, biology, and common sense. Nevertheless, the story of Eden in Genesis 2 and 3 is critical to a Most Insidious Lie because it provides the basis for what, in later philosophies, would be called "original sin," and original sin is indispensable to politicians, for without it, we mortals would not be in need of salvation.

Of course, you've known this story since you were a child: Adam and Eve, the only two people on earth, are living in a beautiful garden that God had planted for them in Eden. Satan lies to Eve and gets her to disobey God by eating an apple and sharing it with Adam; God retaliates by kicking them both out of the garden, thus revoking their immortality and introducing pain, suffering, and death into the world. Right?

Well, sort of right. Let's go over it again, just to clear up a few misconceptions.

After God has made woman and placed her in the garden with man, we are told that "the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." To many people today—certainly to the millions of practicing nudists—this seems a pretty silly statement; why should they be ashamed? But to the ancient Jews who wrote this account, being seen naked was a terrible violation. This is evident in their numerous and strict laws on the subject and is vividly illustrated in the reaction of Noah when he realizes that his adult son has seen him naked.³ These nomadic people lived in tents with little privacy and nothing between them and the vast deserts but their robes, being naked meant being uncivilized—no better than animals. Therefore, to state that the first humans were not ashamed of being seen naked was the strongest possible way for a Jewish writer to emphasize that the first people on Earth were completely uncivilized, like animals, with no sense of right and wrong.

Next, we are introduced to the serpent, a symbol of wisdom throughout many cultures. Note, that there is no reference to an evil entity; Satan was not invented until early Christians decided that an unholy power was required to explain the presence of evil in the world. Up until then, if there were terrible things to be done, the Jewish god, Jehovah, was perfectly capable of handling the job Himself.

The serpent asks the woman if God has told her not to eat of any of the trees in the garden. She replies that God told her not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden, "lest you die." (Note:

the word "apple" does not appear in the story.) The serpent replies: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The serpent has gotten a lot of bad press for making this statement, and perhaps he deserves some of it, but, in fact, everything he said was true! Neither the man nor the woman died, their eyes were opened, and they did come to know good and evil.

God becomes very angry when He finds out about this infraction and He hands out curses all around. The serpent must thereafter crawl on its belly and eat dust. God says He will "greatly multiply" the woman's pain in childbirth. And He tells the man that he will have to work for a living "until you return to the ground."

And then God says, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever,"⁴ He sends Adam and Eve out of the garden. Note here, that there is no indication that Adam and Eve were going to live forever in the garden (and lost their immortality when they got kicked out). In fact, it seems that they were forced to leave precisely to prevent them from becoming immortal (by eating from the tree of life).

There is much high strangeness in this story. What kind of God can't see the man and woman hiding in the garden and has to call out "Where are you?"? How could the pain of childbirth be multiplied when it hadn't been experienced up to that moment? And, most strange, indeed, what is meant by the phrase "become like one of us"? This is carrying the "editorial we" or the "royal we" much too far. Clearly, the reader is to understand that God is speaking to His peers, whoever they might be.

As interesting as such puzzles are, the overriding question is: What does it mean to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Many people, especially puritanical preachers, have muddied the issue with references to

sexuality. This is understandable; if you can't (or don't want to) explain something, just imply that it involves sex and most people won't question you any further on the subject.

But sex is never mentioned in the story. Neither is lust. Or even love. There is no talk about bodily functions or emotional urges at all.

In essence, the story of the Garden of Eden is saying that when humans learn to distinguish between good and evil (that is, when they gain the mental capacity to foresee and evaluate the future impact of their actions), they lose their ability to live as the animals do, free of responsibility, duty, and the burdensome knowledge of their own mortality. In other words, wisdom brings painful awareness of vulnerability (i.e. nakedness) and of death.

Once upon a time, we lived in paradise, blissfully unaware of moral choices, ethical dilemmas, free radicals, and cholesterol. Then we got bitten by the wisdom snake, and we opened our eyes to see the often-troubling consequences of our actions, so we started worrying, and we stopped smelling the roses, and went out to work for our bread.

And what of the pain of childbirth? There is a direct physical link here. Wisdom requires more developed brains, which necessitate larger heads, which stretch the birth canal beyond its design specifications.

Some say this world of trouble is an illusion, caused by our hysterical reaction to the serpent's venomous view of things. Maybe we can achieve paradise once again; maybe we can't. But the point to remember is that the story of the Garden does *not* talk about a "fall of man" or about "original sin"; the politicians didn't think of that concept until centuries later.

Without a generalized, inherent sin, mankind is in no need of universal salvation. It may well be that we can improve our heavenly lot by following the teaching of this or that master; but Adam and Eve's legacy does not burden us with the need to be "saved"—by Jesus or anyone else.

A Sumer Garden

Some 5,700 years ago, civilization sprang up in Sumer, on the plains where the Euphrates and Tigris rivers meet in what is now Iraq. Seemingly from nowhere, great cities appeared with the first known planned streets, irrigation systems, and lush public gardens. When the Sumerians lost their cities to the Akkadians 500 years later, they must have lamented the loss of their glorious gardens on the plain.

In the Sumerian language, the word for "plain" was "eden."

When the Jews of 900 B.C.E. speculated about the origin of mankind ("adam" is Hebrew for "mankind") they wrote that it occurred about 3,000 years previously in a "garden eastward in Eden." In other words, about 600 miles due east of Jerusalem on the plains of Sumer.

Coincidentally, the word "eden" also happens to be a Hebrew word that means "delight."

So, the birthplace of civilized man naturally came to be thought of as a "garden of delight."

— adapted from *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*, pp 21-30.

Still Responsible

The fact that you were born without some dark stain upon your soul does not mean that the way is clear to do your own sinning without consequence. We are all free to get ourselves into as much trouble as we like.

So what, then, is sin? A majority of the followers of the three main western religions would refer to some version of the "Ten Commandments" for guidance on this question, so let's consider a "Cliffs Notes" version of the ten — actually nine⁵ — commandments:

1. No other Gods
2. No idols
3. No swearing on the holy name
4. No work on 7th day
5. Honor dad and mom
6. No killing
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No lying
10. No envy

The first four of these are all about the Jewish priesthood protecting their turf (and their livelihood) from outside competition. This is said to have started some 3,200 years ago when Moses granted his brother Aaron exclusive rights⁶ to access Jehovah, and is of no consequence to any truth seeker.

The fifth commandment is rather innocuous — providing, that is, that the parents in question are not irresponsible drug addicts, violent abusers, child pornographers, etc.

The tenth (Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's whatever.) is one of the earliest examples of a law that is intended to criminalize normal behavior; thus, laying a guilt trip on an entire population. (See *Most Insidious Lie #3* for more on the use of shame as a tool to subjugate and impoverish one's neighbors.)

Commandments 6 thru 9 may seem straightforward and applicable to modern life, until one realizes that their authors meant them in a very restricted and jingoistic way. Lying to foreigners, stealing from Gentiles, killing non-Jewish men, women, and children, were all acts glorified throughout the Old Testament, both before and long after Moses delivered the tablets. And, to men who had multiple wives and concubines, adultery meant using another Jew's property without permission. Raping the women of conquered tribes was both expected and often enjoined.

Altogether, then, we can consign these ancient prohibitions to history's garbage heap and move on to more contemporary sources in our search for the meaning of sin.

On second thought, I'll spare you the summation of 5 millennia of criminal law, and jump

to my favorite definition of sin, as stated by the esteemed author, Robert A. Heinlein:

*Sin lies only in hurting other people unnecessarily.*⁷

I would add “knowingly” before “hurting,” although I quake at the idea of editing the master.

To put all this in positive and more relatable wording, the absence of a fundamental sin by our progenitors does not free us of the need to be compassionate, tolerant, respectful, honest, and forgiving in all our dealings with each other.

Conscience Decisions

In the Early 1900s, Aleister Crowley popularized the phrase: “Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law.” This is quite dangerous advice, sure to get one in trouble in every realm, *unless* “thou” refers to a person who is in harmony with his or her conscience.

Every soul comes equipped with a conscience, an instinctual understanding/feeling of what is right and wrong, positive and negative.⁸ But here, in the physical realm, there are many powers that compete with the urgings of that

conscience. The allure of achievement, the call of duty, the drive for dominance, the need for security, the thirst for vengeance, and other such forces can diminish or virtually stifle that “still small voice” that tells us right from wrong. When someone succumbs to such forces and suppresses or ignores the urgings of their conscience, they may not suffer any ill effects — until that is, they find themselves free of their animal bodies — then there really can be “hell to pay.” This is because the physical brain, by its nature, tends to insulate the residing soul from its conscience and, once physical death has set the mind free from the brain, the soul becomes subject to the perfect memory of its deeds and the full knowledge of its transgressions. Or, to quote Spiritualist philosopher David Gow: “The flames of a materialistic hell-fire are but a pale representation of the pangs of an outraged conscience.”⁹

And so, the best advice I can give is to try and ignore the pressures of the material world, recall who you really are, and follow the counsel of your conscience.

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END NOTES

¹ Gen 1:24-27

² Gen 2:7, 19-22

³ Gen 9:20-24

⁴ Gen 3:22

⁵ In order to have attain the magical number 10, “various Christian bodies have divided them quite differently. Some divided the first commandment about God into (1) You shall have no other Gods and (2) You shall make no graven images. They are identical in meaning. Others divided the last commandment into (1) You shall not covet your neighbor's house and (2) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. They are obviously two aspects of the same injunction. The number ten, however, served the didactic purpose of teaching.” —John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, 1991, p. 252.

⁶ More on this can be found under the heading “Nepotism in Extremis” on page 3 of the House-of-Infamy document, titled *A Monster Named Moses*.

⁷ In *Time Enough for Love*, page 352. He goes on to say: “All other ‘sins’ are invented nonsense. (Hurting yourself is not sinful — just stupid.)”

⁸ This paragraph is derived from the concluding text of my book, *The Hereafter Trilogy*.

⁹ Gow, David, “The Philosophy of Survival,” in *Survival*, edited by Sir James Marchant, 1924, p. 140.