

Sin

INTRODUCTION

THE sin of Satan and the sin of Adam are among the great mysteries of the Christian religion. Satan is highest among the angels, the first of God's spiritual creatures. He is only less than God in the perfection of his nature. Adam is created with supernatural graces and gifts, his immortal body is completely responsive to his spirit, his appetite in all things is submissive to his reason, and his reason is turned toward God, according to the original justice which harmonized his faculties and the elements of his nature.

The only evil latent in either Satan or Adam would seem to reside in the privation of infinite being, power, and knowledge. But this is not a moral evil in them; it is neither a sin nor a predisposition to sin. Hence the only cause of their sinning, if God himself does not predestine them to sin, must be a free choice on their part between good and evil. If God positively predestines them to sin, then they would seem to be without responsibility, and so without sin. If they are not predetermined to evil—if, except for the weakness of being finite, they are without positive blemish—how does the conflict arise in them which opens the choice between good and evil and impels them, almost against the inclination of their natures, away from good and toward evil?

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, God says of Adam: "I made him just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." Of Satan and fallen angels, as well as of Adam, God observes:

They therefore as to right belongd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate:
As if Predestination over-rul'd
Their will, dispos'd by absolute Decree

Of high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.

Yet there is a difference between Adam and Satan. The fallen angels "by their own suggestion fell, self-tempted, deprav'd." Satan, having sinned, becomes man's tempter. "Man falls deceiv'd by the other first: Man therefore shall find grace, the other none."

As Satan approaches the Garden of Eden to work his will on man, he contemplates his plight. He does not deny his sin, he does not repent it, he does not seem fully to understand it. Thus Milton has him speak:

O thou that with surpassing Glory crowned,
Look'st from the sole Dominion like the God
Of this new World; at whose sight all the Starrs
Hide thir diminisht heads; to thee I call,
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;
Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
Warring in Heav'n against Heav'n's matchless King;
Ah wherefore! he deserved no such return
From me, whom he created what I was
In that bright eminence, and with his good
Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.
What could be less than to afford him praise,
The easiest recompense, and pay him thanks,
How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,
And wrought but malice; lifted up so high
I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burthensome, still paying, still to owe . . .
O had his powerful Destiny ordained
Me some inferior Angel, I had stood
Then happie; no unbounded hope had rais'd
Ambition. Yet why not? some other Power
As great might have aspir'd, and me through mean
Drawn to his part; but other Powers as great
Fell not, but stand unshak'n, from within

Or from without, to all temptations arm'd.
Hads't thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
Thou hadst: whom has thou then or what to
accuse,

But Heav'n's free Love, dealt equally to all?
Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate
To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
Nay cursed be thou; since against his, thy will
Chose freely what it now so justly rues.
Me miserable! which way shall I flie
Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire?
Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
O then at last relent: is there no place
Left for Repentance, nor for Pardon left?
None left but by submission; and that word
Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame
Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduc'd
With other promises and other vaunts
Then to submit, boasting I could subdue
Th' Omnipotent.

Before Satan approaches Eve, Adam reminds her of their debt of obedience, saying that God requires

From us no other service than to keep
This one, this easie charge, of all the Trees
In Paradise that beare delicious fruit
So various, not to taste that onely Tree
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life.
So neer grows Death to Life, what ere Death is,
Some dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou
knowst

God hath pronounc'd it death to taste that Tree,
The only sign of our obedience left
Among so many signes of power and rule
Conferrd upon us, and Dominion giv'n
Over all other Creatures that possesse
Earth, Aire, and Sea. Then let us not think hard
One easie prohibition, who enjoy
Free leave so large to all things else, and choice
Unlimited of manifold delights.

The temptation to disobey first moves Eve in a dream in which the apparition of an angel speaks of the forbidden fruit

..... as onely fit
For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men;
And why not Gods of Men, since good, the more
Communicated, more abundant growes,
The Author not impair'd, but honourd more?

"Here, happie Creature," the vision says to her,

Happier thou mayst be, worthier canst not be:
Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods
Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confin'd,
But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes

Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
What life the Gods live there, and such live thou.

Later when Satan in the guise of the Serpent actually addresses Eve, he argues in the same vein, that as he, by tasting of this fruit, speaks as a man, so Eve and Adam, if they too partake, "shall be as Gods, knowing both Good and Evil as they know." Eve succumbs and, as Milton tells the story, Adam, knowing fully the evil of his act, joins Eve in disobedience, not from envy of the gods, but out of love for her, willing to die because unwilling to live without her.

Willing "to incurr divine displeasure for her sake, or Death . . .

..... he scrupl'd not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceav'd,
But fondly overcome with Femal charm.
Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
Skie lowr'd, and muttering Thunder, som sad drops
Wept at compleating of the mortal Sin
Original.

IN THE POET'S expansion of the third chapter of Genesis, the basic elements in the Judeo-Christian conception of sin seem to be plainly accented: the pride and envy which move Satan and Eve, the disobedience which results from the disorder of Adam's loving Eve more than he loves God. In *The Divine Comedy*, another great poem of sin and salvation, Adam speaks to Dante in Paradise and tells him that "the tasting of the tree was not in itself the cause of so long an exile, but solely the overpassing of the bound." Earlier Beatrice explains why, in order to redeem man from sin, the Word of God assumed human nature—"the nature which had estranged itself from its Maker." She tells Dante that "this nature, which was thus united to its Maker, was, when it was created, pure and good; but by its own self it had been banished from Paradise, because it turned aside from the way of the truth and its proper life." Man can fall from his nobility by "sin alone . . . which disfranchises it and makes it unlike the Supreme Good, so that it is little illumined by Its light; and to its dignity it never returns unless, where fault has emptied, it fill up with just penalties against evil delight."

The preacher in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* notes that "Sin . . . is a twofold enormity. It is a base consent to the promptings of our corrupt nature to the lower instincts, to that which is gross and beastlike; and it is also a turning away from the counsel of our higher nature, from all that is pure and holy, from the Holy God Himself. For this reason mortal sin is punished in hell by two different forms of punishment, physical and spiritual."

In both the pagan and the Christian conceptions of sin, man's pride and his disobedience of divine commandment are usually connected with the very notion of sin. The heroes of the Greek tragedies, exhibiting the tragic fault of pride, seem to forget that, though they strive with gods, they are only men, subject to laws they cannot disobey without catastrophe. In *The Iliad*, Phoenix cautions Achilles to rid himself of pride and "beat down your great anger. It is not yours to have a pitiless heart. The very immortals can be moved; their virtue and honour and strength are greater than ours are, and yet with sacrifices and offerings for endearment, with libations and with savour men turn back even the immortals in supplication, when any man does wrong and transgresses."

In pride and disobedience we find the deep disorder of love which lies at the heart of sin. Pride is self-love in excess of what the self deserves. Disobedience, as in the case of Milton's Adam, may be prompted by a love which, too, exceeds the worth of the object loved. The measure of that worth, or the bounds put upon the love of self or other, is set by the Supreme Good which, ordering all other goods, should also order our loves in proportion to their goodness.

This seems to be the central insight of *The Divine Comedy*. It is given a summary statement in "Purgatorio," where Virgil explains how love is the root both of virtue and of sin. "Neither Creator nor creature," he says to Dante, "was ever without love, either natural or of the mind, and this you know. The natural is always without error; but the other may err either through an evil object, or through too much or too little vigor. While it is directed on the Primal Good, and on secondary

goods observes right measure, it cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure. But when it is turned awry to evil, or speeds to good with more zeal, or with less, than it ought, against the Creator works His creature. Hence you can comprehend that love must needs be the seed in you of every virtue and of every action deserving punishment."

Dostoevsky offers us further thoughts concerning the relation of love and sin. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zossima makes lack of love the punishment as well as the substance of sin. To those who ask, "What is Hell?" Father Zossima replies: "I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love . . . They talk of hell fire in the material sense. I don't go into that mystery and I shun it. But I think if there were fire in the material sense, they would be glad of it, for, I imagine, that in material agony, their still greater spiritual agony would be forgotten for a moment . . . Oh, there are some who remain proud and fierce even in hell, in spite of their certain knowledge and contemplation of the absolute truth; there are some fearful ones who have given themselves over to Satan and his proud spirit entirely. For such, hell is voluntary and ever consuming; they are tortured by their own choice. For they have cursed themselves, cursing God and life."

To avoid sin, the only positive commandment, according to Father Zossima, is to love in accordance with God's love. "Love a man even in his sin," he counsels, "for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth . . . And let not the sin of men confound you in your doings. Fear not that it will wear away your work and hinder its being accomplished. There is only one means of salvation; then take unto yourself, and make yourself responsible for, all men's sins; that is the truth, you know, friends, for as soon as you sincerely make yourself responsible for everything and for all men, you will see at once that it is really so, and you are to blame for everyone and for all things. But throwing your own indolence and impotence on others, you will end by sharing the pride of Satan and murmuring against God. Of the pride of Satan, what I think is this: it is hard for us on earth

to comprehend it, and therefore it is so easy to fall into error and to share it, even imagining that we are doing something grand and fine."

In the disorder of love which leads to sin, sin is itself enjoyed for its own sake, and the disobedient act is pleasant because it is forbidden. In that also there is the pride of supposing one's self to be a law unto one's self. In his *The Confessions*, concerned most immediately with his own sinfulness, Augustine reflects upon the pears he stole in his youth, not, as he says, from any desire "to enjoy the things I coveted by stealing, but only to enjoy the theft itself and the sin . . . If the crime of theft which I committed that night as a boy of sixteen were a living thing, I could speak to it and ask what it was that, to my shame, I loved in it." He had no need of the pears. "No sooner had I picked them," he says, "than I threw them away, and tasted nothing in them but my own sin, which I relished and enjoyed. If any part of one of those pears passed my lips, it was the sin that gave it flavour."

He keeps on asking himself what it was that attracted him in that theft, what it was that he enjoyed in that childish act of stealing. Since he could not break God's law, he wonders, "Was it that I enjoyed at least the pretence of doing so, like a prisoner who creates for himself the illusion of liberty by doing something wrong, when he has no fear of punishment, under a feeble hallucination of power? Here was the slave who ran away from his master and chased a shadow instead! What an abomination! What a parody of life! What abysmal death! Could I enjoy doing wrong for no other reason than that it was wrong?"

IN THE PAGAN AND Judeo-Christian conceptions of sin, the fundamental meaning seems to depend upon the relation of man to the gods or to God, whether that itself be considered in terms of law or love. The vicious act may be conceived as one which is contrary to nature or reason. The criminal act may be conceived as a violation of the law of man, injurious to the welfare of the state or to its members. Both may involve the notions of responsibility and fault. Both may involve evil and wrongdoing. But unless the act transgresses the law

of God, it is not sinful. The divine law which is transgressed may be the natural law that God instills in human reason, but the act is sinful if the person who commits the act turns away from God to the worship or love of other things.

To disbelieve in God, in divine law and divine punishment, is also to disbelieve in sin—at least in the sense in which religious men have distinguished between saints and sinners, between the righteous and the wicked in the eyes of God. "There are only two kinds of men," writes Pascal: "the righteous who believe themselves sinners; the rest, sinners, who believe themselves righteous."

Those who reject the religious meaning of sin do not deny the wide prevalence of a sense of sin, nor do they deny that many men suffer remorse for transgressions which they suppose to be evil in God's eyes; but, with Freud, they interpret these feelings of guilt in terms of natural causes. They hold that the person who is tormented by conscience suffers from an illusion concerning the true nature of his guilt. When the sense of sin is intensely active and is, in addition, apparently unexplained by the character and conduct of the person, the guilt feelings, according to the Freudian view, take on the attributes of pathological distortion and become part of the symptomology of the neuroses. There is no question about the sincerity of the person who is thus agonized, but only about the true causes of the agony.

"When one asks how a sense of guilt arises in anyone," Freud says, "one is told something one cannot dispute: people feel guilty (pious people call it 'sinful') when they have done something they know to be 'bad.' But then one sees how little this answer tells one." What accounts for the judgment a man makes of himself as good or bad? Freud's answer is that "what is bad is, to begin with, whatever causes one to be threatened with a loss of love; because of the dread of this loss, one must desist from it. That is why it makes little difference whether one has already committed the bad deed or only intends to do so."

The external authority of the father and, through him, of society becomes, according to Freud, "internalized by the development of

a super-ego. The manifestations of conscience are then raised to a new level; to be strict one should not call them conscience and sense of guilt before this . . . At this second stage of development, conscience exhibits a peculiarity which was absent in the first . . . That is, the more righteous a man is, the stricter and more suspicious will his conscience be, so that ultimately it is precisely those people who have carried holiness farthest who reproach themselves with the deepest sinfulness . . . A relatively strict and vigilant conscience is the very sign of a virtuous man, and though saints may proclaim themselves sinners, they are not so wrong, in view of the temptations of instinctual gratifications to which they are peculiarly liable—since, as we know, temptations do but increase under constant privation, whereas they subside, at any rate, temporarily, if they are sometimes gratified.”

Freud applies his theory of the origin of feelings of guilt (in “the dread of authority” first and later in “the dread of the super-ego”) to the religious sense of sin. “The people of Israel,” he writes, “believed themselves to be God’s favorite child, and when the great Father hurled visitation after visitation upon them, it still never shook them in this belief or caused them to doubt His power and His justice; they proceeded instead to bring their prophets into the world to declare their sinfulness to them, and out of their sense of guilt they constructed the stringent commandments of their priestly religion.”

In general, Freud thinks, the great religions “have never overlooked the part played by the sense of guilt in civilization. What is more, they come forward with a claim . . . to save mankind from this sense of guilt which they call sin. We have drawn our conclusion from the way in which in Christianity this salvation is won—the sacrificial death of one who therewith takes the whole of the common guilt of all upon himself, about the occasion on which this primal sense of guilt was first acquired.” The conclusion referred to is developed in two of Freud’s works which are devoted to the consideration of religion and sin—*The Future of an Illusion* and *Totem and Taboo*. In the latter of these books, Freud tells us, he had first

“expressed a suspicion that perhaps the sense of guilt in mankind as a whole, which is the ultimate source of religion and morality, was acquired in the beginning of history through the Oedipus complex.”

OTHER WRITERS, who approach the problem of sin in legalistic rather than psychological terms, either make no distinction between crime and sin or make the distinction without referring to God. Spinoza, for example, prefaces his explanation of the meanings of “praise and blame, merit and crime,” with a discussion of the difference between “the natural and civil state of man.” In a state of nature, he says, no one is “bound by any law to obey any one but himself. Hence in a natural state sin cannot be conceived, but only in a civil state, where it is decided by universal consent what is good and what is evil, and where everyone is bound to obey the State. Sin, therefore, is nothing but disobedience, which is punished by the law of the State alone.”

Though Hobbes does not identify crime and sin, his distinction between them does not seem to be based on the contrast between the civil law and the divine law, unless the latter is equated with the law of nature. “A crime is a sin,” he writes, “consisting in the committing (by deed or word) of that which the law forbiddeth, or the omission of that which it hath commanded. So that every crime is a sin, but not every sin a crime. To intend to steal or kill is a sin, though it never appear in word or fact, for God that seeth the thoughts of man, can lay it to his charge; but till it appear by something done, or said, by which the intention may be argued by a human judge, it hath not the name of crime.

“From this relation of sin to the law,” Hobbes continues, “and of crime to the civil law, may be inferred, first, that where law ceaseth, sin ceaseth. But because the law of nature is eternal, violation of covenants, ingratitude, arrogance, and all facts contrary to any moral virtue, can never cease to be sin. Secondly, that the civil law ceasing, crimes cease; for there being no other law remaining, but that of nature, there is no place for accusation; every man being his own judge, and accused

only by his own conscience, and cleared by the uprightness of his own intention. When therefore his intention is right, his fact is no sin; if otherwise, his fact is sin, but not crime."

The more strictly religious conception of sin seems to be exemplified by Pascal's remark that "all that God does not permit is forbidden" and that "sins are forbidden by the general declaration that God has made, that He did not allow them." Whatever God does not permit, "we ought to regard as sin," for "the absence of God's will, which is all goodness and all justice, renders it unjust and wrong."

With the precision of a theologian in these matters, Aquinas defines the peculiar type of evil which is sin. "Evil," he writes, "is more comprehensive than sin, as also is good than right . . . Now in those things that are done by the will, the proximate rule is the human reason, while the supreme rule is the eternal law. When, therefore, a human act tends to the end according to the order of reason and of the eternal law, then that act is right; but when it turns aside from that rectitude, then it is said to be a sin." Elsewhere he says that "every created will has rectitude of act only so far as it is regulated according to the divine will . . . Thus only in the divine will can there be no sin, whereas in the will of every creature, considered according to its nature, there can be sin."

THE THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION of sin involves a tremendous range of topics, and problems as significant as they are subtle. The dogma of original sin, for example, raises questions not only about the cause and character of Adam's transgression, but also about the punishment which is visited upon the children of Adam in perpetuity, and about the conditions under which man can be reclaimed from his bondage to sin, both original and actual or personal.

There seems to be some resemblance between the Christian doctrine that Adam's sin merits a penalty to be paid by all subsequent generations, and the Jewish doctrine of the collective responsibility of the people of Israel for the sins of their ancestors, even unto the third and fourth generation. But the points

of difference appear to be more fundamental than the similarity.

In the first place, the sins of the fathers from which later generations suffer are the individual sins of men whose natures are predisposed to sin, as Adam's, before the fall, was not. In the second place, the punishment is visited not upon the whole human race, but only upon the Chosen People, and in the form of temporal scourges rather than in a corruption of human nature itself.

Furthermore, the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel questions the justice of collective responsibility. "What mean ye," he asks,

that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel . . .

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

According to Christian teaching, the justice of individual punishment for the sins which individuals commit in their own lifetime does not apply to the penalty which all men must pay for the sin of Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world," Saint Paul writes to the Romans,

and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

The Christian doctrine of original sin thus appears to be closely connected with the Christian doctrine of the need for a divine savior—God Himself become man to redeem man from the taint of sin, and through the sacraments He instituted to provide the instruments of healing grace and the means of repentance for, and absolution from, both original sin and the individual's own personal sins.

The understanding of the sacraments; the theory of grace in relation to the original and fallen nature of man; the issue concerning grace and good works, or God's justification and man's merit, in the achievement of sanctity and salvation; the distinction between the everlasting perdition of hell and the expiatory punishments of purgatory—all these fundamental theological problems are involved in the consideration of sin and its consequences, both temporal and eternal.

Some of these problems are discussed in the chapters ON MAN, ANGEL, IMMORTALITY, and PUNISHMENT. Other matters, such as the classification of sins according to the distinction be-

tween spiritual and carnal, mortal and venial, and the enumeration of the various species of both mortal and venial sin in the order of their gravity, are problems of moral theology. Though they belong primarily to this chapter, they are also related to the classification of virtues and vices, especially to the theory of the theological virtues; and among the theological virtues, especially to charity, which is the principle of sanctity, even as pride is the principle of sin.

Of all points in the consideration of sin, the distinction between original and acquired sin is perhaps the most important, not only because inherited sinfulness is conceived as the predisposing cause of all other sins, but also because the human nature corrupted by sin is conceived as fallen below the perfection of a purely natural man as well as below the state of grace in which Adam was created. As Adam had gifts which made him superior to the natural man—immortality, infused knowledge and freedom from error, immunity from concupiscence, exemption from labor and servility—so the children of Adam, cast out of Eden, have ingrained weaknesses which make them unable to achieve the goods or attain the ends proportionate to their human nature.

Among all Christian theologians, Calvin takes the most extreme view of the consequences of original sin which has flawed the fallen nature of the children of Adam. Before he disobeyed God by an exercise of his free will, Adam was free to choose between good and evil and had the power to work freely for his salvation. But after Adam's fall, the human race, cast out of Eden, lost its freedom of choice. "When the will is enchained as the slave of sin, it cannot make a movement towards goodness, far less steadily pursue it." It is only by faith, the gift of God's grace, not by good works voluntarily done, that souls can be saved. Calvin comments on the "great darkness of the philosophers" who think free choice is inherent in human nature without recognizing that man's fallen nature is flawed primarily by the loss of that gift. Thus, Calvin is more anti-Pelagian than Augustine.

According to some theologians, the purely

natural man, without either the gifts of grace or the wounds of sin, has never existed. It is this mystery of man, having natural aspirations which exceed the weakened powers of his fallen nature, that Pascal seems to contemplate in all his observations on "the greatness and wretchedness of man"—the "astonishing contradictions" which he thinks only the Christian religion explains. In the state in which men now are, he writes, "there remains to them some feeble instinct of the happiness of their former state; and they are plunged in the evils of their blindness and their lust, which have become their second nature."

"As the result of original justice," Aquinas writes, "the reason had perfect hold over the lower parts of the soul, while reason itself was perfected by God in being subject to Him. Now this same original justice was forfeited by the sin of our first parent . . . so that all the powers of the soul are left, as it were, destitute of their proper order, whereby they are naturally directed to virtue. This destitution is called a wounding of nature . . . In so far as the reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the wound of ignorance; in so far as the will is deprived of its order to the good, there is the wound of malice; in so far as the irascible is deprived of its order to the arduous, there is the wound of weakness; and in so far as the concupiscible is deprived of its order to the delectable as moderated by reason, there is the wound of concupiscence. Accordingly, these are the four wounds inflicted on

the whole of human nature as a result of our first parent's sin."

Aquinas rejects the supposition that "the entire good of human nature can be destroyed by sin," arguing that what sin diminishes is "the natural inclination to virtue, which is befitting to man from the very fact that he is a rational being." But "sin cannot entirely take away from man the fact that he is a rational being, for then he would no longer be capable of sin."

Other theologians take a more extreme view than Aquinas and Augustine. They attribute depravity rather than weakness to human nature as a consequence of original sin. "On the Calvinistic theory," J. S. Mill writes, "the one great offense of man is self-will." Under the maxim that "whatever is not a duty, is a sin," men are left with no choice. "Human nature being radically corrupt," Mill continues, "there is no redemption for any one until human nature is killed within him." But, according to Augustine and Aquinas, original sin does not deprive the individual man entirely of the power to establish his worth, though it puts him in need of God's help to be worthy of salvation. Between the one extreme which holds that men can be saved by God's grace alone, and the other extreme which supposes that men can win salvation by the merit of their own good works, Augustine and Aquinas try to take the middle position, according to which neither grace without good works nor good works without grace will avail.