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## **The Little Things: Deconstructing Christian doctrine and theorizing a loving justice**

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“Some believe that it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. It is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love.”

-J.R.R. Tolkien

### ***Introduction***

Those who know me well will be surprised by this statement: I was cleaning the other day. I was cleaning the other day, and I found a sock. It was a tiny sock, impossibly tiny to wear for any person I know currently. Incongruous as it lay seemingly fresh against a rumpled old Led Zeppelin t-shirt, it sported delicate pink, yellow, and green stripes, a frilly lace band around the opening, and a tiny silk pink flower stitched to the side. I recognized it immediately, of course. It belonged to my daughter, and it enjoyed frequent use on her tiny feet when she was a young toddler just learning to use them. Powerful recollections welled like surf, but took a more generalized form; smells, energy, affect. A lump formed in my throat underneath a melancholy smile. Our daughter is almost twelve years old now; she is growing up into a beautiful, strong, compassionate, wise young woman.

When our daughter was a tiny girl, care was taken to make sure her room was kept well, that her clothes were washed and put away for her. That sock along with its companion often were

reclaimed from the dryer and folded late at night. Sometimes I would creep into her bedroom, a grey specter with a laundry basket, and place her newly cleaned clothes in drawers as she slept. In the morning as I helped her get dressed, I would retrieve those socks to put on feet which so closely resembled mine in miniature.

We have been misled it would seem. We have been encouraged to seek justice in big things; big acts, big places, big power; justice we are told is gargantuan, lumbering, total, sometimes brutal, but always big and always from above. Justice, we are told, necessarily requires top-down authority, the power of coercion, the rarified nobility of fluted columns, the elevation of the judge's bench. Borrowing Jeremy Bentham's colorful turn of phrase, the idea that justice is big, forceful, and hierarchical is "nonsense upon stilts." Were she alive today, Michael's grandmother would call it "canal water." Gibberish, bunk, hooey, hokum, moonshine, hogwash, drivel, poppycock, malarkey. And then some.

Our purpose in this essay is to put the lie to golem big justice as it wanders oaflike around the American hinterlands, that only through the powerful, the downward, and grandiose is truest justice possible, that there is some economy of scale with justice. We seek to retune our attention to where truest justice truly resides. Justice does not come from the tip of a spear or the barrel of a gun, neither does it issue forth from the Leviathan, nor can it be bought in bulk, nor does it descend from another plane of being, and nor does it store well. Instead, justice is something altogether different from what we have come to understand, and yet it is something intimately familiar. Truest justice dwells in tiny acts of kindness, of listening, of seeing another for their beauty. Justice is what happens when one person commits to being present for a person in need. Real justice is granular, tiny, modest, quiet, humble, and gentle. In this essay, we will explore an example of justice in Judeo-Christian doctrine that is generally well known, but is both an illustration of, and very likely a key contributor to, contemporary broken and unsustainable views of justice. We will then offer a revised (in truth, probably the intended) version of that example of justice that is both consonant with existing doctrine and yet also liberates humans from an abusive relationship with God.

Our overarching contention is that justice is love, meaning "the artlike, individualized, unconditional, aware, and end-less praxis whereby a human or organization mindfully, assertively, and continuously labors for the actualization of another human being as an end in herself, without thought of return, without reliance upon authority, without fear, or possibility of cessation" (DeValve, 2015: 103). It is a deceptively simple and incredibly complicated assertion at the very same time; the task, art, and praxis of loving is profoundly demanding yet powerful and rewarding. What is more it is our natural state as humans as a communal species, and thus a thing familiar and close. Without love we fail to thrive; parental nurturance into childhood has made bigger, mightier brains possible. It stands to reason, then, that a loving justice system is our birthright (DeValve, 2015). Justice as we conceive it is the same when acting in response to tender nurturance as when responding to harm, as both are a function of need. A tiny pair of socks, washed, unrolled and lovingly applied to a daughter's feet is justice, just as what we do for both authors and victims of harm is justice, because what we do in response to harm must be a function of need, skillfully tended, selflessly offered. Justice is just as much the thing we ought to do in response to grotesque harm as it is the thing we ought to do to celebrate a child's first steps. Where justice and love are synonyms, justice practice becomes a naturally nurturing thing, which celebrates the beauty of each human, regardless of whether they are brand new among us or whether they have done grievous harm over the long arc of their lives. Justice is guided by need, through the praxis of self-refining service that is love (DeValve, 2015). And such need is rendered in the tiny space between two people.

What we have constructed instead of the justice we deserve is a now-and-again, happenstance, plywood-and-bailing-twine semi-functional stand-in for a justice system that is at most capable of a weak-tea proxy for justice (Young, 2011). It runs flat-out, redlined, to create its poor

understudy for justice. Many of us accept the proxy as justice, even uncritically, for we are led to conclude that we have no means of indicting the outcome as fraudulent. Affect-informed social responses couched in vengeance seem satisfying yet leave us malnourished and tasting only ashes. Or perhaps we accept this chintzy copy because we conclude it is the best we can do, or worse, that it is the most that we deserve. This, too, this sense of bottoming out, is itself a fraud. The current model requires considerable upkeep and is resource hungry. The natural alternative is elegant, mighty, and eminently sustainable.

We find ourselves, then, at something of a decision point: we can either continue with our unsustainable, underpowered, fossil-fuel guzzling, smog belching partial solution, or we can find within ourselves the courage to shed the familiar in exchange for clean, sweet air, and effective, sustainable, renewable justice. Our hope is that in time you the reader will feel again the strength of your limbs, revived by a renewed sense of the breath of justice in your lungs, and the grit of service under your fingernails. We hope that you will know better that settled sense of serenity that comes from an honest letting-go, from doing loving justice.

But where does justice dwell, then? This essay challenges three related ideas: (1) justice is a thing that requires a *deus ex machina* intervention from God on behalf of us quaking below; (2) justice requires the implicit possibility of force, and; (3) justice requires grand narratives, grand acts, and vast systems. In contrast, we argue that justice dwells in the space between you and me, in gentleness, in the little things.

From a justice-as-love perspective (e.g., DeValve, 2015), where actualization of each claimant is the end sought, one outcome variable that might differentiate successful from unsuccessful justice endeavors is whether or not parties to a dispute are more able to get along with each other, themselves, and others. Simply put, we must ask “Does it work?” Otherwise Peacemaking Criminology (or perhaps zemiology) writ large is little more than pretty ideas. Challenging the idea that justice is big, coerced, and top-down or numinous, then, can be done by examining its shortcomings; how does it fail, and what are the consequences of failure. The Christian doctrine of Original Sin as portrayed by Augustine and the second creation myth in Genesis as interpreted by many contemporary Christians both contain the big, forceful, and hierarchical justice. As we will show, not only do these doctrines cause considerable harm for their broken thinking about justice, the intended reading of Genesis’ second creation story is both far less destructive and far more ennobling.

#### ***A Note on our Analytical Approach***

It is also worth raising the issue of the utility of religious doctrine for a criminological purpose. Contemplating religious arguments philosophically has a rich and storied tradition which we shall not recount here. Our purpose is somewhat different, though, as it seeks to liberate as much as contemplate; the real concern at this point, then, is whether it makes sense to critique a religious claim from the perspective of a foreign ontology. Such a task might seem to be pointless for its fundamental mismatch of assumptions; two perspectives from semi-contrasting ontologies might not even share sufficient semantic agreement to proceed to the point of deriving anything useful. In fact, though, Western understandings of crime and justice are deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian doctrine. It only makes sense, then, to examine the religious ontological frameworks that gave breath to our ideas of crime and justice.

Bertrand Russell (1914/2008), in contrast, makes strong claims about the nature of philosophy, what is and what is not its proper business. From an analytic-philosophical perspective, questions of human destiny are out of bounds for philosophy. Perhaps so for analytic philosophy, but such a stance if applied to philosophy more broadly, if he were to be taken as a philosophical traffic cop, the business of philosophy would be thin indeed, and the business of criminology would be as philosophically rich as a box of saltines. In fairness his faith in science was a function of his

time; he writes with an abiding faith in the physical sciences, even though he writes in the shadow of the Titanic's one-way voyage to the silent icy murk, and as the clouds of the Great War gathered over Europe. Certainly he and we write on either side of the modernist divide, and that such critiques from us are only natural. But Russell's right-of-way claim, weak as it is, rings familiar to the assertion that pontiffs and philosophers are in fundamentally different businesses. They aren't. With all respect, Professor Russell's error illustrates the larger truth that the preacher and the professor pursue something in common. They may vie over territory, but deepest questions are, to a considerable degree, common to both. Rather, the preacher and teacher both ask deepest ontological questions; differing assumptions and epistemologies can enrich as much as they divide.

### ***We Have Been Lied To: Numinous, Forceful, or Grand Justice in the Doctrine of Original Sin***

Below we will contemplate the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. We will highlight the aspects of this doctrine that involve grand, forceful, and numinous justice-related claims. We will also illustrate that such claims are not necessary, and in fact, far more fertile and beautiful interpretations of the Eve creation story exist. We will see, then, that there is no need for a forced, destructive, clumsy, and unsustainable exegesis of the creation narrative and Jesus' significance, and that a far more elegant, useful, and compelling narrative is possible with far less effort and suffering.

### ***Violence and Christian Doctrine***

Violence is the process whereby a living being is cut. The victim of violence is in some way cleaved, made partial, separated, or partitioned; her wholeness denied, she is made less than she was, diminished. In rather gruesome fashion, sometimes the parts of her that have been hacked off, in recent cases, her reproductive parts, are put to a particular use (e.g., attaining higher office), making the violence more dehumanizing for its instrumentality. Marx might have identified alienation as a kind of a cutting; Weil (e.g., 1951) spoke in terms of affliction, a pain beyond pain that severs root from stem. Violence need not be of a grander scale to concern us, of course. Violence can do its cutting in very localized and intimate ways. Certain ideas are especially good at doing so, in fact, as we shall see.

One particularly treacherous instrument for violence is religious doctrine. Now, it is crucial to make clear our distinction between doctrine and spiritual wisdom: spiritual traditions often are enviably wealthy with sound and practical insight for how to live one's life sonorously with other humans and the rest of existence. In contrast, some religious organizations cultivate and propagate a torture toolkit of claims that are toxic to the wellbeing of sentient beings. These claims serve multiple purposes, including organizational bounding, and assuring its continuation, e.g., through fear. For example, loving one's enemy and practicing forgiveness are examples of spiritual wisdom; the condemnation of homosexuality and the portrayal of women as subservient to men are examples of violent religious doctrine. Spiritual wisdom is precious, whereas violent religious doctrine damages, divides, and diminishes. Some versions of Christian doctrine, for example, cut as deeply as a masterfully made katana; they divide the whole against itself by denying part of the whole as such. These dividing doctrines strip the human of her noblest and most profound capacities and ascribe them to a being (God) that cannot use them without breaching the laws of physics.

The Christian doctrine of Original Sin (which we will not capitalize further) is a clever piece of cleaving. The doctrine asserts that humans are born sinful as a result of the seduction of Adam and Eve. The stain of the Fall is beyond human capacity to cleanse from ourselves. Only by intervention by God can the sinner be reclaimed from eternal fire. As a view on justice, then, humans should be kindling for Hell's furnaces (justice involves force), but God (grandly) intercedes (justice comes from numinous intervention). It sets the Christian against herself by denying all that is noble within her as being hers. If it is holy, it cannot be from you, the doctrine argues. It is a crucial piece of cleaving as well, as it sets up the necessity of justification through faith, rooted in Augustine's soteriology, and coming to full flower in Calvin and eventually in Karl Barth.

Without a shade of doubt, the concept of original sin in contemporary Protestant theology is a criminologically relevant claim. Though sources differ regarding the relationship between original sin and volitional sin, at the very least a resemblance exists between the two in the sense that both involve human harmfulness. As we shall see, Augustine saw them as related phenomena (Hiestand, 2007). But the idea of original sin is itself deeply harmful, as it argues that humans are (a) in need of redemption due to the stain of Adam's sin, and (b) incapable of redemption from that sin on our own. If essential sin is related to volitional sin, even in passing, then the social response to harm must pay close attention to essential sin as partial first cause. The implications radiate in all directions; the logic of culpability-finding and sanctioning all take on a decidedly different tenor. Indeed the entire network of social accountability is shifted radically if Augustine's claims (which we will treat momentarily) are to be honored.

The assertion of original sin, however, is a convoluted, overly-elaborate, ultimately unnecessary idea, which is, at bottom, an iteration of violence. It: (a) is demeaning and destructive to humans' sense of capacity, nobility, and worth; (b) is logically inconsistent with other claims of contemporary Christianity; (c) not only is theologically unnecessary, it occludes some of the more profound and useful teachings of Jesus; and (d) it appears to privilege church-organizational ends over the well-being of adherents. Again, big, numinous and forceful solutions are preferred.

Below we will examine the doctrine of original sin. In this conversation, we will treat the harms done by the doctrine, as well as posit briefly one theological alternative that both preserves the core of Christian thought and celebrates the human heart. Justice is not a thing that requires descent from on high, conditioned upon contrition below. It is not the fruit of force, nor is it pompous. Instead, it dwells in little things, little decisions, little moments, each full of promise.

### ***Original Sin, Creation, and Justification***

The doctrine of original sin is so deeply dehumanizing in fact that it seems difficult to defend it, particularly in a faith that teaches unqualified love. Why would Augustine go through considerable pains to insist upon it? We will contemplate why this might be later on, but first we must have a grasp of the nature of the narrative itself. That means contemplating the events portrayed in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 in some detail. We must also consider the creation account that precedes it, and the Christian view of the narrative's conclusion, specifically justification and salvation.

#### ***The Creation Narrative***

According to many Western Christian accounts of the events portrayed in the second and third chapters of Genesis, the first man, and eventually the first woman, are made and given a place to be. In this place there was an abundance of all man and woman (in Hebrew, *the Adam*, meaning people) needed for a life of ease. Within that place of plenty, though, a tree was set apart from the rest, and its fruit were forbidden to man and woman. "For in the day that you eat of it," Adam and Eve are told, "you shall die" (Genesis 2:17, NRSV). Very soon after, a serpent approached the woman. More "subtle" (in Hebrew, *arum*, variously translated as cautious, prudent, crafty (NRSV, Darby), astute (Jubilee 2000), clever (GW), and shrewd (Tree of Life)) than other creatures, the serpent and she had a telling conversation, beginning the third chapter of Genesis with a question. The King James translation poses the question thus: "Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). Eve explains, even exaggerating somewhat, that every other tree is for them, but that if they eat of *that* tree, or even *touch its fruit*, they will die. The serpent's response varies according to translation, but common among versions he seems variably incredulous; "You will not die." he asserts, "for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good from evil" (Genesis 3: 4-5, NRSV). And indeed, they do not die, though they are forever changed. One might assert that part of them dies, though it is just as fair to observe that part of them is awakened.

The only fruit tree mentioned anywhere in Genesis is the fig tree; its leaves were soon to become important (as couture), and it stands to reason that the fateful fruit was a fig, though authorities differ (Cooper, 1997). Investigating, she discovered that the fruit was indeed edible, and even delightful to see. She ate some; not dying, she found it appealing enough to share with her beloved. Well, upon eating, they became aware of nakedness, and fashioned for themselves crude garments from fig leaves. Right away they heard God moving in the garden nearby, and they hid. God calls for them, but they offer a mumbly reply: "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:8, NRSV). God figures out what was up right away: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:11, NRSV). Adam tries to throw his beloved under the metaphorical bus. She then points a finger at the serpent. What follows is a list of punishments for each of the characters in our play: the serpent will travel the world on his belly; there will be enmity between the serpent's and Eve's progeny (Genesis 3:14-15, NRSV), each striking at each other for all time. Eve and her forbears will suffer greatly in childbirth, yet she and they will desire their husband (Genesis 3:16, NRSV). For Adam, his punishment is both toil and fate: he will work mightily to raise food from the soil, fending off thistle and vermin until he himself returns to the soil from which he came. "See," God said, they "have become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22, NRSV). God then fashioned a rotating blade and guards around the tree of life, as well as clothes of animal skins for the couple as they departed the Garden.

First appearances here are not the most flattering for this God character: he creates without vision, then deceives his creation, and finally punishes them inconsistently without justification after his creation discovers his deception. The story ends with God seemingly wringing his hands about the vast potential of his creation. As a clumsy creator, Victor Frankenstein might feel at home with this dubious God fellow.

Naturally, then, a number of disconcerting questions arise from the story: why did God tell Adam and Eve that on the day they ate a forbidden yet delicious fruit they would die, when clearly no such outcome was arranged? If the tree were truly something Adam and Eve were never to have, why put it at the center of the giving Garden in the first place? What is the nature of this fruit that, when eaten, makes one aware of good and evil, and thus little less than God? Most of all, what are we to understand by God's reaction to the breach of trust? The exegetical resolution of these questions has direct bearing on the Christian understanding of the idea of sin (Fredriksen, 2012), and thus sheds light on the contemporary American sense of justice. We see in this account of our creation, and for Christians, our condemnation, a contemporary understanding of justice as grand, numinous, and forceful: God's sentencing statements at the end of Genesis 3 are not merely (by definition) numinous and unjustifiably punitive, but is a sentence passed on all of humanity and Alethinophidia alike, for all time.

It should go without saying, of course, that the differences that exist between, say, Protestant and Jewish hermeneutics for the story of Adam and Eve are a function of at least two dynamics. First, although Genesis chapters 2 and 3 in the Torah (Bereshit), the Vulgate, and the King James Bible are all quite close in translation, communities of faith differ in the understanding of the original language; to wit, in this case an awareness of the original script's meaning and subtext in Hebrew, including subtexual meanings of words as well as syntactical nuance and cultural references. But even here, among Rabbinical interpretations of the story there is variation, albeit less. Second, exegetical variability of any kind is also partly rooted in human social context, including common interests, fears, and concerns (though it may be limited by our cognitive architecture) (e.g., Whitehouse, 2001). Variation between Christian and Jewish readings of the story, for example, are partly related to the desire of early Christians to draw a bright line between Christianity and its parent faith (e.g., Pentecost, 2002), rather than to elucidate some ontological truth. People who see the world

with eyes of fear and cruelty will orient the Adam and Eve story accordingly. Those who see the world through eyes of gentleness and compassion will take a wholly different view.

Logically, then, a given exegesis is not viewable simply as first cause of a related worldview. Exegesis and worldview may well function in a non-recursive, mutually-reaffirming fashion. Such a function seems somewhat ironic, as one of the primary purposes of scripture is to guide, to move believers into thought and practices that are consonant with the tenets of the faith in question, and rather less to reaffirm one's own worldviews. Exegetical rattle and hum is a concern for those interested in understanding how theology shapes individual and collective understandings of harm and justice. It is reduced considerably when a faith's core tenets are made clear, asserted repeatedly, and are internally coherent (it is, after all, a philosophical system). Almost certainly it was a driving concern for those assembled at Nicaea in 325. Indeed, as we will observe later, consistency probably played a nontrivial role in the determination of legitimacy for each of the synoptic gospels. And it was also likely a concern for Augustine as he wrote. But whatever the cause and whatever the effect, exegesis speaks directly to the value set of a community. Be it chicken, egg, or both, exegesis gives voice to value.

If we are to influence American thought about justice, even today in richly diverse America, it is essential to understand Christian thought regarding sin, good, and evil. What follows is an examination of the thought of a highly influential Christian theologian who develops and relies upon the doctrine of original sin. From this examination, we will be able to see not only its tenuous beginnings, but the degree to which other thought is bent out of shape to maintain the centrality of original sin in the constellation of Christian ideas. After, we will highlight some of the damage done by the idea of original sin, and then conclude this section with a treatment of a theological option that is both less theologically and humanistically violent, but also which preserves (and even deepens) the Christian Message.

### ***Augustine's Original Sin***

Rome's fate long since sealed, its dissolution occurred in stages. The Vandals nibbled away at Roman North Africa in the early fifth century looking for a home, and in 430 they laid siege to Hippo (present-day Annaba). By this time, Augustine had lived a long, full life; in 430 he was 75 years old. Wheat stood unharvested in the field as the deprivation, and desperation, of the residents of Hippo deepened. Though he was not one to avoid a fight, he no longer possessed the vigor of his youth, and within months of the start of the siege, Augustine was no more. He was fortunate, perhaps, to have escaped the inevitable choice of conversion or death that would confront many members of his bishopric flock; his suffering was relatively short-lived. It was an end, though, that he might have seen as vindicating his thinking regarding the City of God: the City of Man is fragile, and the Christian in the world is a traveler in a foreign land. It is interesting to contemplate to what degree early Christian writers wrote with somewhat more than a hint of eschatological zeal as a result of their proximity to Rome's long slouch into oblivion.

Augustine was born, lived and died at the very precipice of Roman order, in North Africa, and in these final decades of the formal existence of the empire as such. If we are to take him at his word, he was a reluctant clergyperson (Augustine, 2006). Once engaged, however, he took to the task he assigned himself with uncommon vigor: he sought to offer a coherent Christianity that was consonant with orthodoxy yet was an alternative to the Donatist schism popular in Africa at the time. His vigor led him late in life to a dubious collision between himself and an unassuming British cleric named Pelagius. Pelagius taught that humans were basically good, and that although God is the beacon toward which we all should move, because humans possess free will, they are capable of affecting their own salvation. This was heresy in Augustine's eyes, and eventually in the eyes of the African church; Pelagius was excommunicated sometime around 418 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). Current apologists argue that the Pelagian heresy is vociferously rebuked by scripture, and indeed John 14:6 poses something of a challenge for Pelagius, one which we will address below in

the critique of Augustine. Instead, let us turn now to an exposition of Augustine's view of original sin. Such an understanding will cast light on how many Christians today view themselves, others, and justice. First, let us just note here that Augustine was not the author of the idea of original sin. The groundwork for the idea was laid by Paul, and if it has a "father," that person is probably Irenaeus. Augustine's formulation, though, enjoyed particular influence in Europe among a number of Protestant thinkers, who themselves had considerable influence on American morality and jurisprudence.

For Augustine, much is suspended from the idea of free will. Humans have capacities greater than other animals, he says, and among these is the ability to act according to will. Augustine dedicates considerable energy to the examination of human evil; how can a creation of God who is perfect be an author of evil? His solution is to rely on free will: humans are *from* God, yes, but not *of* God (Augustine, 2006: e.g., p. 437). The capacity of free will in God's creation does not indict God in the evil machinations of that creation. And it is this capacity for self-determination that laid us low. It is also in free will that humans find salvation, according to Augustine; when we choose to assume the hard yoke of a Christian life, we assure our continued existence. The betrayal in the Garden is also a special case of free will going awry. The choice to taste the forbidden fruit was precisely that: a choice. As a result, Adam and Eve, along with all of their progeny, are condemned to suffer, hurled onto the edge of darkness and hopelessness, save for the undeserved grace of God.

"For as soon as [Adam and Eve] had transgressed the commandment, divine grace forsook them, and they were confounded at their own wickedness" (Augustine, 2006: 505). Aware of their nakedness, fig leaves served their naked need in a pinch; Augustine presumes that fig leaves were nearest to hand. (It is interesting to note that the fig tree is the only fruit tree mentioned by name in the narrative. One might be forgiven for speculating that, because of its convenience at that very moment, the fig was the offending fruit, and not the apple portrayed in the masterworks). "They experienced a new motion in their flesh which had become disobedient to them, in strict retribution for their own disobedience to God. For the soul, reveling in its own liberty, and scorning to serve God, was itself deprived of the command it had formerly maintained over the body" (Augustine, 2006: 505). The choice being made, and the condemnation being passed, the flesh began "lust against the Spirit, in which strive we are born, deriving from the first transgression a seed of death, and bearing it in our members, and in our vitiated nature, the contest or even victory of the flesh" (Augustine, 2006:505). Having misused their free will, Adam and Eve condemned themselves along with the rest of us, forever to suffer in irredeemably tainted flesh, to the degree that no efforts of our own could possibly free ourselves from the eventual second death – the ultimate obliteration of ourselves when flesh once again becomes earth.

Perhaps it should not surprise us, then, that Augustine marries free will and sin more generally: "For no sin is committed save by that desire or will by which we desire that it be well with us, and shrink from it being ill with us" (Augustine, 2006: 532). Sin is lie; it is free will directed toward a misunderstood sense of what is good for us in the long term. After all, in John 14 Jesus says "I am truth." Case closed. Or is it? It turns out Augustine is talking about free will, but more as well, though he seems unaware of the presence of others in the room. Specifically, we can see in the cast of characters the play of free will, but we can watch it dance among mitigators and aggravators, making the simple story Augustine seeks to tell rather more convoluted than he might like. His solution seems simply to ignore these dynamics; he accepts God's judgment as flawless, even though today we should hesitate to send a child to the death chamber for stealing a banana.

It is important also to observe that Augustine took the position of a traducianist: humans are created by God as whole beings, complete with body and soul. Such a view is particularly salient for us to grasp Augustine in that one chief support for traducianism is found in Genesis 2:7; nowhere else do we hear of God breathing the breath of life (a soul?) into anyone ever again. This view is essential for an understanding of Augustine's perspective on the consequences of the Fall. In the Garden, there was to be no death (Augustine, 2006:495) There is something of a difficulty in the Genesis narrative for those who would argue (as Augustine does) that the wage of original sin is

death. God told Adam and Eve that on the day they ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, “for in the day that you eat of it, you will die” (Genesis 2:17, NRSV). The difficulty, of course, is that they did not die on that day. Augustine resolves this tension by arguing that they did indeed die that day, but in a metaphysical sense: God forsook the souls of the convicted two, and upon death of the body, the soul would forsake their bodies (Augustine, 2006: 505). The abandonment of humanity is fully justified, so the argument goes, and only by “the undeserved grace of God” (Augustine, 2006: 527) are we restored once again to unity with God and spirit; upon the death of the body, the spirit rejoins God in Heaven, but only in instances where the one shuffling off her mortal coil has been restored to spiritual fullness by God. The devout still die, of course (Augustine, 2006: e.g., p. 505), but Augustine is careful to make clear that such death is not a statement on their piety. “...Earth, as they say, must return to earth, out of which the terrestrial bodies of the animals have been taken” (Augustine, 2006: p, 505).

Now, the justly condemned “begot corrupted and condemned children” (Augustine, 2006: 505), to wit, you and us. Through the means of our creation, to wit sex, we too are carnal and thus consigned to the flame by the sin that made us. But we are not merely unwitting victims of our own creation; related to Augustine’s traducianism, he argues that all of us – every human that has been and will ever be – is implicated in the crime in the Garden, as the stain is passed down through the very act of our creation, thus we all bear responsibility for the Fall nearly equal to its original authors. “In the first man...there existed the whole human nature, which was to be transmitted by the woman to posterity, when the conjugal union received the divine sentence of his own condemnation...” (Augustine, 2006: 495). All men come from one individual; our condemnation comes from one act of misled defiance.

### ***Critique of Augustine***

If one act stains us so totally, might we in our misery at the least deduce something useful regarding the etiology and proper social response to other harmful behavior? Is the indelible taint of original sin something of a get-out-of-jail-free card regarding post-Garden culpability? Are we to understand that discernible mitigating circumstances are to play no role, just as they played no role in the Garden? From Augustine’s perspective, justice is a thing strange to our eyes, even if we have not taken the time to notice. We understand almost intuitively that circumstances mitigate culpability; we do not hold children to the same level of criminal responsibility as an adult (those rare cases where we do are not done because the child is wise beyond his years, but because it makes us feel better to punish the child more harshly than his tender years beseech).

It seems Augustine was fond of both having cake and eating it as well. Human free will is a key tent post of his reasoning, yet a stark and unresolved problem exists for him. If it was with the fruit that a creature gifted with free will finally came to understand the difference between good and evil, it seems vindictive and myopic to say the least to punish one for using free will without the capacity to understand the choice laid before her. Yet we are to understand the bitter punishment meted out to Adam and Eve as being fully just. But how could we? God fails to weigh the capacity of Adam and Eve to adroitly use their free will. In effect, God ignores *mens rea* in his passing sentence on humanity. Worse, His only avenue for appeal is a prayer direct to Him; no collateral estoppel is available. Even if Augustine tries to convince his audience otherwise, for the rest of us not in the Garden we are condemned for a thing for which we bear absolutely no responsibility; the idea that our very existence tainted from the sex that made us is not only preposterous, it contradicts fundamentally the assertion of free will. Such a condemnation exists in doctrine it seems in order to make Jesus indispensable, to give scriptures like John 14:6 a particular, church-empowering meaning. For all that is said about the Genesis creation story, from a criminological perspective, it is an utterly horrible tale of justice, and Augustine’s take on it serves only to make it worse. Perhaps it is little wonder we cannot seem to get it right.

And what of that serpent? He did nothing more or less than tell the truth. “That dude... the one with the golden countenance and the beard like mighty waves breaking on boulders... he lied to

you.” Indeed it seems he had, and what is more, it makes utterly no sense as to why a forbidden but nourishing tree would be placed in the middle of such a place as Eden. Why would God virtually assure their breach of his *one* commandment in this fashion (and then later expect creatures *now indelibly flawed* uphold *ten* commandments)? Further, God’s words are particularly odd here: “*For in the day that you eat of it you shall die.*” That they will eat of it seems presumed by God’s choice of words. *When* it happens, not *if* it happens; such verbiage is almost uniform across translations. Almost: the Complete Jewish Bible translation provides something of a different view: “You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die” (Genesis 2:17, CJB). Such a translation seems to offer Augustine at least some defilade for his account, but there is quite a bit of supposition in his model, and more than this little help is needed to support so effortful and meandering a tale as Augustine’s original sin. It is also worth noting here that Augustine never learned Greek (Fredriksen, 2012). To what degree his reliance on Latin translations impacted his decision-making is beyond our ability to infer.

One is tempted to speculate as to why he might have argued as he did (it seems to me he was anxious to help provide the church with doctrine that advanced its social influence in the world), but it seems clear that Augustine (and indeed perhaps others before him) has grossly misused this gorgeous narrative from the Torah, creating in it more than was intended. The narrative has the unmistakable flavor of creation myths, generally, but especially ones from cultures that neighbor and predate it, like Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation account. We humans are storytellers; *Homo Fabularum*, perhaps. As a species, without our formidable technology, we are hairless, clawless, and probably tasty. The world is a very big and very scary place for humans without Smith & Wesson, SUVs and Starbucks. Stories salve as much as they solve. Creation myths often are cosmogonic, providing accounts as to how the known universe came to be as it is. To a degree as a result, they can be used to offer explanations for things in the world that concern us; they are stories told to groups, perhaps gathered at or in anticipation of special events. Commonly, creation myths address the interrelation between chaos and cosmos, between order and disorder. Why is there enmity between serpent and man? Why does human childbirth hurt while for other animals no such suffering is evident? Why do we die? Over time such a story accrues additional meaning as symbols and characters are used and reused, stories are told and retold. But the stories themselves most often exist in the first place as solace-giving entertainment. The Genesis creation myths are no different in this regard.

The second creation myth crucially creates the idea of sin, of disobedience to God. The pain of childbirth and the scraping of a living from the earth are situations that are now yoked to the idea of fear of God, such that His agents on earth must also be feared. Seen in this way, then, sin is little more than tyranny. More, a duality of desire is created where human nature is doubled back upon itself, weaponized. Although there is a concupiscence for divine things and The Divine Presence, there is as much a prurient and fleshly concupiscence. Humanity is prone to sin by virtue of its most fundamental nature: *natura nostra peccavit* (“our nature sinned”) (Fredriksen, 2012).

### ***The Harm of Original Sin***

The harm done by the doctrine of original sin is shared between believers and those to whom they owe duties. It is essentially conceptual in nature, though it has very real consequences for living beings. Specifically, the doctrine of original sin creates a vein of fear in the reasoning regarding basic Christian policy. Being Christian is something one does, at least some of the time for some adherents, out of the fear of spiritual death as described by Augustine. Currently, as many Christians receive their faith, they understand there to be for them something of a guidebook made of two basic sections: pre-savior and post-savior.

Augustine’s assertion that we are fundamentally incapable of affecting our own salvation from wrongdoing has an oddly liberating twist: if we cannot save ourselves, and are totally dependent upon God’s grace to reclaim us from the forsaking deaths Augustine presents to us, then

we are off the hook, as it were, for our sinful *nature*. If we are capable of doing better, we are still tainted by a nature that is not of our creation and thus cannot be held against us. Indeed, it would seem that when we fail to do better, our nature should stand in as a powerful mitigating force. Augustine's reliance upon free will as being that part of us that is Godlike may help him elsewhere, but it does not save his argument here. If it is free will that is at the foundation of our sinful nature, it does not seem reasonable to treat God's creation the same way one would treat God, even if there is a degree of resemblance in this sense. That I possess free will does not necessarily mean that I am skilled with its use. The Genesis creation story leaves no room for the newfound owners of free will to have even a learner's permit for their new skill.

### *Misogyny and Paternalism*

The portrayal of Eve being a willing dupe who drags Adam down with her, an insubordinate rib, serves to support a view is in part likely responsible for what many perceive to be a war on women among conservative Christians, and justifies a hierarchical justice framework with women in a subordinate position. Instead, a celebration of the beauty of humanity as being the fruit of a womb's nurturance fundamentally reorients our direction regarding bodily shame and human beauty in a far more healthful and enlightened direction.

“Division by socialization into sex roles divides the human psyche itself, so that love cut off from power and justice is pseudo-love, power isolated from love and justice is inauthentic power of dominance, and justice is a meaningless façade of legalism split off from love and real power of being (Daly, 1973:127).

In essence, Daly is referring to the public/private divide of the sexes; men-public-power and women-private-love. But what of justice? Here, justice IS love AND authentic power, void of numinous / dominance, masculine, forceful, grand, and patriarchal structures which oppress us all.

Why focus on the Genesis story, and Adam and Eve to discuss justice today? At its core, this origin story accomplishes two things; it explains human suffering and organizes the hierarchy of men and women in society which continues to this day. Mary Daly (1973:45) argues that “the myth has projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and the “nature” of women that is deeply imbedded in the modern psyche” and that it “has in fact affected doctrines and laws that concern women's status in society and it has contributed to the mind-set of those who continue to grind out biased, male centered ethical theories”. More to the point, “literature and the mass media represent the “temptress Eve” motif in deadly earnest, as do the rationalizations for social customs and civil laws, such as abortion legislation, which incorporate punitive attitudes toward women's sexual function” (Daly, 1973:45).

For women, the harms and violence done in the creation story originate from the historical context of the story itself. According to Gerda Lerner (1986), the Genesis story in the Hebrew tradition is in some ways dissimilar from the other human origin stories in the region, yet also subsumes some elements, all be it transformed, of what came before it into a new story. This is not unusual and there are many examples of the ways that as Christianity spread, many of the old ways were incorporated into the new traditions in order to make the transition easier for people. Within the larger region, origin stories featuring Gods and Goddesses still remained, their world is in many ways no different from the humans on earth; families and relationships, maternal procreation. Then, in Genesis, a male God, acting on his own, brought all of creation into being “is entirely unlike anything humans can experience” (Lerner, 1989: 180). This is a historical shift in the creation story, which has had consequences for women, men and society up to this day. By altering the creation story to one where the power lies in the hands (or words) of a male God lays the foundation for the superiority of men over women, their ability to create and shape the world, as well as removes from women the procreative capacity (Tuana, 1993). The acts of procreation and birth are completely erased in the Genesis story, all is created by the words of a man. Not to mention that in the second

story of creation in Genesis, Eve is created BY a man (God) FROM a man (Adam), further erasing the contribution of women through gestation and birth (Tuana, 1993). Such a portrayal of Eve justifies a hierarchical view of justice; as Eve was a second thought, she is rightly viewed as a second-class citizen.

Genesis provides two different versions of how Adam and Eve were created. In the first, God creates both man and women, simultaneously, both in his own image (Tuana, 1993). In this first version, we can see that man and woman were created equally. However, in the second telling of the creation story, Adam is created first from the dust, then the animals, with Adam awarded the ability name them. Next, Eve is created from the bone and the flesh of Adam's rib, and again he gets to name her. In its simplicity, the story here creates and justifies the superiority of men over women in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Although as shown here, two versions occur in the same story, the more detailed account of Eve being created from the rib has prevailed throughout history because of what it does to create and sustain the hierarchy of society.

That God created Eve from Adam, recognizes that God sanctified the superiority of men over women. This is reinforced in the later writings of men, such as Augustine who theorizes male superiority over women using dualistic hierarchy of the soul over the body (Ruether 1974). In this case, Adam, being the first created by God, embodies the purest forms of the soul or the spirit, but Eve, having been made from Adam's rib, is literally the corporal form, the body (Ruether 1974; Tuana, 1993). He goes on to discuss how Adam (and men) are always seen as in God's image, but Eve (and all women) are only in God's image when with man (Ruether 1974; Tuana, 1993). Thus, Eve and all women, are never viewed as being of God's image in isolation from men and therefore solidifying women's subordination to God and men. Furthermore, for Augustine, the body symbolizes the weakness of women below the spirit/soul/ mind of the man (Ruether 1974). Women and their bodies are weak, and can be tempted as Eve was, but Adam with rationality must "agree to 'go along'" (Ruether 1974:157). Also with Calvin, who writes that "woman should be the helper of man" and that she is "given as a companion and an associate to the man, to assist him to live well" (cited in Lerner, 1989:183). Furthermore, after the fall, Lerner (1989) argues that Yahweh (in the Hebrew tradition) has solidified the division of labor between men and women in the punishment for their "crime". So it is not just the hierarchy of man over woman in society generally that is conveyed in the creation story, but the division of labor, as well as the mind/body dualism which was also used to justify women's subordination in areas which extend well beyond religion.

However, several Genesis stories and translations exist, but this one has dominated given the historical moment in time to subordinate women to men, and to create as well as maintain the patriarchal society we know today. Often lost in the stories in Christianity is the alternative reading of the first woman created, Lilith. In earlier myths and legends, Lilith was a demon, with many different histories and backstories, some of which are subsumed into the creation story she shares with Adam and Eve. In reading the two creation stories in Genesis, the creation of the two beings, man and woman simultaneously, as equals, could be viewed as the creation of Lilith, which was excluded from later versions (Patai, 1990). Having been created equal to Adam, Lilith violated the patriarchal hierarchy being shaped at the time in two ways; she names herself and she refused to lay below Adam during sex (Hammer, 2001). For these violations, she was banished from Eden and Eve was created from Adam's rib. But the alternative version doesn't end here. In this version, Lilith had already eaten from the tree of life, and being expelled from the garden, can never become human. Eve, however, still can if she eats from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is in this version where it is not the serpent that tempts Eve, but Lilith (Hammer, 2001). Lilith needs to convince Eve to eat from the tree in order to bring into being the souls of children Lilith is giving birth to outside the walls of the garden (Hammer 2001). Some versions of the story tell of Lilith sleeping with Adam after the Fall and being the birth mother of Cain. Others, she remains a Goddess and/or a demon who eventually reigns at the right hand of God. Needless to say, the version which includes Lilith didn't make it into religious Canon.

Eve becomes the cause and an enduring symbol of “the Fall”. Given the creation story where Eve is from Adam’s rib and the later interpretations of early Church Father’s, such as Augustine, it comes as no surprise that the women who is seen as less than rational than man would be susceptible and weak to the temptation of the forbidden fruit (Tuana 1993). Being more connected to her body than rationality of the soul/spirit/mind than man, women were seen as less likely to control their passions, and that women, more so than men were unable to control their sexual desires (Tuana, 1993). Her sexuality could be seen as drawing in the serpent, tempting Adam to also eat of the fruit. Yet, this story is not very different from others which came before it which also attempted to explain why human kind suffers. Lerner (1989) documents several stories of humans attempting to gain the knowledge of the Gods and the similarities to the Genesis story in the form of the tree, food or drink that is forbidden to eat, and lastly, the snake or serpent which previously had symbolized the fertility Goddess and women’s sexuality. As previously stated, incorporation of previous imagery and reappropriating it for the new story, and a new message, is not uncommon. The modesty that the pair feel in the garden immediately after eating the fruit becomes one way this story is used to enforce modesty and shame on women, as well as to justify men’s control of women’s bodies and reproduction.

Lerner (1989:198) identifies in this story the moment in history “of the death of the Mother-Goddess and her replacement by God-the-Father”. While Lerner places the beginning of the transition to a patriarchal society, which the creation story solidifies and maintains, further back in history, the Judeo-Christian tradition remains a significant basis for the inequality, control and harm women experience to this day. All of this was accomplished over the course of later centuries where women were excluded from the continued creation, formation, and reproduction of these modern religions. In the conclusion of her book Gerda Lerner (1989:229) states:

“A feminist world-view will enable women and men to free their minds from patriarchal thought and practice and at last to build a world free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that is truly human”.

This connects back to Daly’s quote at the beginning of this section about love, power and justice. The patriarchal world view has created systems in society, such as religion, science and law which privilege the male view of the world and have created systems which appear to be universal, immovable and unchanging. They are also oppressive, unloving and unjust. Take again the example of birth control and abortion. The laws in these areas historically were written and justified by men, as well as the church which at its base has had the subjugation and control of women’s bodies at its core. Daly (1973:110) asks the question: “Just *who* is doing the reasoning and who is being forced to bear unwanted children?” The abortion debate often presumes a form of equality between men and women in the creation of children, however, the lack of access, affordability and reliability of birth control for women may be the starting point for the inequality in this assumption. Second is the physical burden only women experience in the carrying and labor of the pregnancy. Finally, in the social hierarchy which continues in our society today, women also bear the bulk of the burden of raising a child, even while in a relationship, while also working a job, and take on the risk that they might at some point be left to raise the child on he own (Daly, 1973). Breaking down the walls of patriarchy and power to strive for love and justice will see in each case the unique circumstances of a woman.

One thing that emerges from a feminist critique of the story of the Fall is that these grand narratives which have provided a basis of patriarchy for hundreds of years, also reveal the problematic nature of grand narratives in the pursuit of justice. Only in the little things, the day by day erosion of the patriarchal hierarchy, the submission of individual women to men in relationships, in the work place, and in social interactions

## **An Alternative Interpretation**

It turns out that Jewish use of the second creation narrative in Genesis is considerably different than the Christian use, and the difference is truly striking, at least to us. More to the point, as the document was initially from the Jewish tradition, it is more correct to observe that the *intended* message of Genesis' second creation narrative is strikingly different (and far kinder) than the one concocted by early Christian scholars (e.g., Fredriksen, 2012). Rabbi Manis Friedman (2012) offers a tender and beautiful take on the Genesis story. He begins with critique, ratifying our view that as the frontispiece of the Torah, the story is, well, suboptimal. He observes that the Torah establishes 613 mitzvahs to which Jews are expected to adhere, yet Adam and Eve, living under the best of possible circumstances, are given one mitzvah, no less by God himself, and within the hour they break it. He highlights the flawed psychology of God's one-statute criminal code: the day you eat from this tree you will die. In the instance, more (and less) than death is the actual sentence passed: humans are now mortal; men now must work the land for wheat; women will bear children in pain; snake and human will forever tilt. Instead, he argues that the decision to eat the fruit was fully intentional, and was, well, the fruit of a deliberation between Adam and Eve as they contemplated their wider mission on earth (Friedman, 2012). The mission, he says, was to descend to the lowest level on earth and to elevate it. The command not to eat the fruit was, thus, not a command at all, but a choice: pass on the fruit, live in impotent paradise. Eat the fruit and take on the mantle of mission along with the pains of mortality. To Adam and Eve, what was death after all, as according to the story, they were quite literally brand new?

It was Eve, Friedman tells us, who figured out that God had given them a choice; sending them to life's lowest berth would be a cruelty (Friedman, 2012). If they chose to serve at their own cost (in Friedman's interpretation, the serpent embodies the world outside Eden and thus is the beneficiary of Adam and Eve's choice), then they would be truly noble and mighty. Adam and Eve, he argues, were placed at the precipice of a choice: be comfortable and inert or do the hard and loving thing and take the risks that accompany it. And it was Eve to whom Adam pointed when asked by God: "How did you know I wanted you to eat?" "I didn't know," said Adam, "she did." God now presents the plan to the couple: outside this place there is suffering, enmity, pain. Live in this place, this lowest world, and do all you can to heal it (Friedman, 2012). The story, then, is not a morality tale laden with guilt and blame; it is a tale about choice, specifically the choice to connect with suffering and thus be vulnerable, or to keep other humans at arm's length, to be above the muck but not to ever truly live.

Beholding the yawning chasm between Augustine's and Friedman's accounts of the meaning of the Genesis creation story, it seems clear that the story itself is more accurately seen as a canvas on which different painters smear themselves for effect. The dots are the same, perhaps, but the figures that emerge in these different tellings bear closer resemblance to the painters who render them than they do to any uniform subject. Such a narrative is more mirror than window.

## *Christianity without Original Sin*

In such tiny moments vast continents shift; what if the Pelagian controversy had been resolved in the other direction? Pelagius had the crowning misfortune of debating with one of the most gifted rhetoricians of his time, and it seems clear that Augustine loved a good fight. What would Christianity look like today if the playing field had been somewhat more level? What if Augustine had been meeker or less skilled in the art of rhetoric? A radically different understanding of Christianity is possible in fact, even given the seemingly withering soteriology of Jesus' words, like John's in the aforementioned Chapter 14. Verse 6 seems unambiguously exclusive; if one is not Christian, then there is no hope of salvation. Such a slash-and-burn soteriology is not necessary, of course, and in the end it only serves the organizational interests of the church. Obviously, one might interrogate John's grasp of Jesus' meaning. The Gospel of Thomas seems to give sound reason for thinking that John may have missed the metaphorical ball. If we were to compare John 14:6 and logia 77 of the Gospel of Thomas ("the Twin,") perhaps of Jesus, and thus arguably a very high-

fidelity treatment of Jesus' words (Meyer, 2008), one that may well have been written before the synoptic gospels (DeConick, 2001), very similar dialogue seems to be occurring yet the outcomes are *vastly* different, soteriologically speaking. Whereas with the former, ostensibly only one means for salvation exists, Thomas reports Jesus speaking in terms of what can only be described as his interbeing: "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all things come forth, and to me all has reached. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there" (Meyer, 2008: 149).

One counterargument stems from the apocryphal nature of Thomas' gospel, but the mere fact that Thomas' gospel is apocryphal itself is difficult to take as forceful dismissal of its capacity to enlighten, however. Irenaeus, Augustine, Jerome and other early Church scholars emphasize the similarities of the synoptic gospels, including Thomas', as evidence of their fidelity (we are assuming the possibility that Jerome had access to the Gospel of Thomas, *inter alia*). It appears that those chosen for inclusion in the canon may have been chosen because of their similarity to each other. One similarity results from their narrative nature, whereas Thomas' document is a series of logia. Far from presenting an exegetical crisis, substantive differences between Thomas and the synoptic gospels, like the notable lack of eschatological verbiage in Thomas, should be understood to enrich the tradition as a whole.

Even if we were to take John at his word, a simple re-reading of John 14:6 can create an ecumenical inclusiveness: it is not that the only way is through Jesus, but that the only way *to be properly Christian* is to follow Jesus' example. Whereas the earlier exclusive reading may have served a socio-political purpose at some point, in a time of increasing balkanization and xenophobia like we find ourselves in currently, such a narrow and exclusive reading only does harm.

Toward the creation of something of an ethical commonwealth (Rossi, 2005) Kant makes a strong argument for the idea that religion serves humanity most capably as a mechanism for cultivating more foundational human values based on reason, moving us away from immediacy, contention, and commodification, or what Rossi (2005) argues is equivalent to Kant's idea of "radical evil". Toward this end, identifying and then modifying or even excising altogether aspects of doctrine that establish barriers to the creation of the ethical commonwealth serves the furtherance of human freedom and actualization. It is worth a pause here at the end, then, to consider Paul the progenitor, and in particular robust influence on Augustine's wrecking-ball soteriology. Of course a complete soteriological revision of Paul is far beyond the scope of this work; we feel it is sufficient merely to demonstrate that a gentler soteriology is possible, and that it is discoverable in the humblest of spaces.

Exegesis is a living thing, thankfully, and more than a few takes on Paul stake their claims today (e.g., Bird, 2012). Wright (2009) observes that Moses had odds with Pharaoh, not with Sadat. History, theology, and contemporary context shape a living exegesis; new wisdom is found in old and familiar places. Getting it "right" with regard to what Paul was trying to say in the most granular sense is perhaps less rewarding than it might seem. Wright (2009) observes that Paul's corpus (including pseudo-Pauline works) often makes use of subtle references to events and ideas of his time, many of which are lost on contemporary audiences. At the intersection of three worlds (Judaic culture and Judaism, Hellenistic culture, and Roman culture) is where Paul found himself, and it is to these audiences to which he needed to make his appeal attractive (Wright, 2009). A former Pharisee speaking and writing Greek in Roman states, his preaching and writing were often to small groups and, at least in the context of his preaching, sometimes to individuals. He framed his eschatology so as to capture to his immediate audiences, many of whom were sympathetic to the idea of an imminent endtimes. He wove a narrative, often thread by thread in letters and in conversations, which eventually became a significant portion of the Christian Bible. It is not irresponsible to argue that Paul's theology was itself the result of many tiny moments, moments that we today would have a hard time participating in with him. We should not mourn the loss, however.

We are left, we argue, with scripture from which to draw what wisdom we can, perhaps referencing something of an ideological Polaris in Paul's thought. It would seem to us that in the middle of Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth we can find just such a Polaris: love.

## Conclusion

Humans have searched for the idea that would unlock the secrets of human justice; since the first glimmer of human communication justice has been among a handful of defining and invaluable ideas. Justice connects ontological musings with the workaday moment, binds earliest ancestor and most distant descendant of the human family. It has been a search often represented in terms of conflict: armies both fictional and sickeningly real have tilted on churlish turf in search of it; it is sought in the spaces where chaos and cosmos collide, where cause/effect and choice each pleads its case. Justice has been big, it has been asserted on others from on high, it has been delivered on cold steel. Such a thing, though, is not justice at all.

Christianity is a relative latecomer to the systematic contemplation of justice. Augustine sought to (and in the main achieved) an introduction between the Greeks and his adopted Christianity. Whether his aim was to enhance the power of the church on earth through his doctrine or if he reasoned as he did because he could see no other line among the dots remains uncertain, at least to us. What seems clear, though, is that where he took us is rather far afield of the truest justice humans can render.

We tend to crave objective truth like an addict craves heroin, bound choiceless to our addiction, and, fittingly, we are similarly as edified by what we find as by what the addict discovers. The postmodern response may be the natural one: no objective truth exists, there are no right answers. In the end, justice is in the eye of the beholder. In fact neither the slavish pursuit of objective knowledge, nor the wholesale rejection of objectivity represents the highest wisdom. But neither still does the dialectical marriage of the two leave us with more than modest insight regarding the nature of justice. There is indeed objective truth, but it is not where we seek it; there is relativistic wisdom, but its field of action, with its lush green grass, lies mostly hidden from us. Hidden, that is of course, until we find it.

God's problem with us is choice. If we are to believe Augustine, that problem is insurmountable, save by God's exceptional grace. Another way of saying this is that choice is understood by Augustine as a justification for punishment. Here Augustine truly missed the ball: it is precisely our capacity to choose, to decide to love another despite risk, which renders God relevant in the human world. Choice is indeed the problem. It is essential and irrelevant at the same time. Choice cannot precipitate blame. It can only be the pen that authors God into relevance. Perhaps Augustine sought influence for his church, his City of God. If so, well, he surely paid the price. Power is not the capacity to cause humans to act (DeValve, 2016), but is the capacity to decide to do the beautiful and difficult thing without thought of return. To be sure, we are indeed flawed as Augustine says. But such flaws are all the more reason to commit and recommit to the idea of a loving justice. It is our choice to love, to act from selflessness in order to help to actualize another for her own sake; such choices often are tiny, granular choices, made quietly within the mind's sanctuary. Each of us will fall short in our efforts to love; when one of us stumbles, another will be strong, and all will be well. It will be well because we have chosen each other.

What can a tiny sock teach us about justice probably is the wrong question, if the purpose of our query is to divine the truest nature of justice. The sock is only cotton and color. In its essence, the sock is no more love than is a ham sandwich. It becomes the noblest vehicle of love, however, when it is cleaned, paired, prepared, and when needed, placed on the holy foot of a child. The sock itself as a thing external to us is a poor teacher. The moment of loving kindness around it, the sock

that dwells within the dad who manages and applies the sock, now that is a whole different thing. This is no silly trick of language, but instead is a crucial insight into the failings of our justice practice. Often we are careless enough to confuse finger pointing at the moon with the moon itself. From, say, a policing perspective, the idea of best practices often is a fiction, a piper's call toward mediocracy. Police legitimacy is, for some very good reasons, a hot topic currently in the policing literature. Tyler's (1990; 2004) procedural model predominates: the police require the assistance of the community in order to succeed in the task of order maintenance. Community participation is inextricably tied to citizen perceptions of police legitimacy, which is itself a function of the perception of police procedural fairness. Current research examines several aspects of police legitimacy including enhanced measurement of it (e.g., Rosenbaum, Lawrence, Hartnett, McDevitt, & Posdick, 2015); the impact of police practices on citizens' perceptions of fairness (e.g., Gao, 2013); and police perceptions of their own organization's fairness (e.g., Nix, 2015; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Cutting edge work in legitimacy examines, inter alia, the interrelation of procedural justice, uses of force, and police culture (Terrill, Paoline, and Gao, 2016). As attractive as all of this scholarly work is, it fails in the end. Procedural justice can matter, as can organizational culture and the use of force in a community, but the most powerful means of assuring police legitimacy is none of these things in themselves. For police to enjoy legitimacy, they merely must *choose to be legitimate; in every moment within each officer, and in granular interactions between each officer and each person. To be trusted, be trustworthy.* The rest may be empirically neat but ultimately is of limited value.

Legitimacy does not come through a curtailment of consent searches or a police organizational culture modified to prioritize procedural fairness alone. It comes from the million little acts police choose to do, or choose not to do, each day. To choose to authentically care for the wellbeing of a community, and to act from that care in a million ways, *this* is both the means and the end of legitimacy. And it is here where we will find truest justice: in the little things.

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