

OVERREACHING

"SIN" as overstepping, trespassing, violating LIMITS

OCCASION: In critiquing a book-manuscript, I had to ask myself to what extent I agreed with the author's identification of sin as overreaching, &--in hope of helping him--what qualifying notes I might add to my agreement. (No basic disagreement, of course: violating divinely-set limits is at least one dimension of sin.)

PROJECT: I propose to think, on paper, about our spiritual heritage's **primary words for sin** in our three primary languages (Hebrew/Greek/Latin, in reverse order).

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LATIN *peccatum*

The most general term, the widest category: "error, fault, sin," including the effect on order/others, viz. "offense." Thus Luther's dictum "simul justus et peccator" (the Christian, though "justified" in God's eyes by Christ's act, is still an "offender").

GREEK ὕβρις *hubris hubris/hybris*

The ancient Greek tragedians spelled out the "insolence/arrogance" of this word by narrative. Oedipus' killing of his father is objectively "hybristic" (an Eng. wd. since 1831) even though not subjectively (since he didn't know it was his father): the killing was an offense against Dikē, the order/justice of the universe.

The 1943 Webster unabridged has "hubristic" (which OED dates since 1831), but has "hubris" (meaning "excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance") as not yet in Eng. usage (though RHD has it as since 1880-85, & has "insolence" for the Gk. meaning).

A constant element is the sense of going beyond what is acceptable even if only in manners (as in ancient Greek comedy, which tweaked the nose of respectability, often shockingly so). Dave Barry's satirical style is a present-day example of this beyondness: anything extended far enough in a straight line (i.e., in exaggeration) become comedic. ("Beyond" is in the first two of the dozen meanings of "overreach" in RHD.)

EXCURSUS: None of our spiritual heritage's major "sin"-words embeds a metaphor, but the semantic domain of each includes metaphors embedding "tenor" (idea) in "vehicle" (comparative image, functioning representationally as "epiphor" for transference of meaning & presentationally as "diaphor" for producing new meaning by juxtaposition). To the extent it's verbal, religious consciousness is embodied metaphor; theology is a running conversation between tenors & vehicles; & philosophy aims to expound reality within the limits of tenors disembodied from vehicles. Linguistically, the incarnation is a diaphor of reversal: "The Word became flesh" (Jn.1.14).

But while the *major* "sin"-words are nonmetaphorical, the reverse is true of most *secondary* terms swimming in the major words' semantic domains--precisely as in the case of Eng., where "sin" is nonmetaphorical & one of its synonym-clusters denotes decisional failure (i.e., fault for poor decision-making ["sin" from Lat. root of "sons," the result of this failure being "guilt"]) metaphorically.

Some in this cluster are in the title & subtitle of this Thinksheet. The manuscript I am critiquing makes central one metaphor in this one of the clusters of meanings secondary to "sin": in his centering on "overreaching" as synonym for sin, the author needs to be aware that in this particular semantic solar system he's dealing not with the sun but with one particular planet. To convey that awareness was the initial motivation for my writing this Thinksheet.

Now back to our Gk. wd.:

Daily, or at least weekly, in the Lord's Prayer we Christians face, in our texts, both the solar wd. for "sin" (ἁμαρτ. *hamart.* "not to hit," "to miss"--68 pages of fine print in Kittel!--in L.P., only L.11.4) & two planetary more overtly metaphorical terms--one contractual (ὀφειλ. *opheil.* "debts/debtors" [Mt.6.12], "inde-

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bted" [L.14.4]), the other **spatial** (παράπτωματα *paraptomata* "trespasses," literally, putting one's feet where they don't belong [Mt.6.14,15--ε, not in the Lord's Prayer, M.11.25,fn.26--all reff., RSV, NRSV). Of these three metaphors, only the third fits nicely with the metaphor of overreaching, which fits well with the apple (apricot) incident of Gn.3, which from below is (this MS's author well says) "the prototypical act of overreaching" but which from above is the prototypical act of **rebellion** against God, in biblical religion the essence of sin & root of disorder/chaos. "The Our Father" (as Catholics, following the ancient custom of naming documents by their first word/s), in submission to & centering in God (returning to his love & authority [the two notes of the father metaphor]), reverses Gn.3. The Lord's Prayer daily returns us Christians from "coolness of heart and wanderings of mind" to the obedience of faith. And here I should note what is a theme in several publications of this author, viz. the conjunction of the "sibling rivals," science & religion. Sin leads into what both biblical faith & science lead out of, viz. chaos.

HEBREW חטא *chatta*

The LXX (Greek OT) serves as a semantic bridge between the two primary languages of our Christian faith. To ascertain the meaning of a Hebrew word, we cannot bypass how the Alexandrine Jews of the 3rd c. BC/BCE rendered it in Greek. In the case of this the main Hebrew word for sin (238 times in the OT), ὕβρις *hubris* is often the translation, sometimes ἁμαρτία *hamartia*: you will not be wrong to read into our Hebrew word the primary notes of these two Greek words (as they're spelled out in the midsection of this Thinksheet).

The metaphor basic to this Hebrew word is not overreaching but missing a point/target/goal. Broadly, erroneous action (if intellectual, folly). Culturally/legally/theologically, behavior contrary (deviating from) the (expected, required) norm. By extensions, these meanings: deception, violence.

In Gn.4.7, God tells Cain that "sin" (here, our Hebrew word) is like a devouring beast "crouching" at the door of preference for doing "not good" (the negative way of referring to evil [*ra'*] against good [*tov*, twice in this verse]). Note that the beast is to be "ruled over": the *yetzer ra'* (tendency to evil) is not epiphenomenal to humanity, its an inner beast always ready to pounce on us to deflect our aim to please God by willing & doing "good."

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