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## *What Psychology Might Learn from Traditional Christianity*

**Kari Konkola**

Sin used to be among Christianity's most important concepts. This is understandable. The New Testament says God sent His only son, Christ, to liberate fallen humans from the suffering caused by Adam's original sin. The importance of overcoming sins is emphasized by the Bible's oft-repeated warnings about God's sometimes ferociously punishing sinners.

In spite of the central role of sin in the Bible, worry about the cardinal sins—pride, envy, anger, greed, and lechery—has largely disappeared among modern Christians.<sup>1</sup> The reaction of most of today's Christians can be summarized by the expression "good riddance." The "let's talk about something else" attitude toward sin has become the prevailing paradigm even among theologians.

There are several reasons for the silence that today surrounds traditional Christian sins. Possibly the most important is that, thanks to original sin, humans experience sins as instinctively pleasant. This feeling causes human beings to invent rationalizations to justify sinning. The same bias encourages us to invent reasons to ridicule and abandon all restrictions on sins.

The pleasure of sinning meets little resistance because modern readers do not find the Bible's warnings about sins overly frightening. Scientifically oriented Americans have difficulty taking seriously—still less being scared by—the idea that somewhere up in heaven an old, beard-

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KARI KONKOLA is a scholar who focuses on the influence of Christianity in English history.

<sup>1</sup> Kari Konkola, "Have We Lost Humility?" *Humanitas*, Vol. 18, nos. 1-2, 2005. The article can be found at [https://css.cua.edu/humanitas\\_journal/have-we-lost-humility/](https://css.cua.edu/humanitas_journal/have-we-lost-humility/) (Retrieved 08-29-2018.)

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ed, long-haired man in a flowing white robe watches us and punishes sinners. The “believe it if I see it” attitude extends to the idea that after our deaths the same old guy will sit in judgment and decide whether we spend eternity in the pains of hellfire or the pleasures of heaven.

Yet perhaps we should not dismiss traditional Christian sins so lightly. Is there not even scientific evidence strongly suggesting that the attitudes formerly called sins may be quite harmful? This article will present reflections on evidence from one such source. Much of modern psychology is based on discoveries made by psychiatrists and psychotherapists while observing their patients. But this is not the first time in history that a large group of professionals has been able to investigate the inner functioning of the human mind. Catholic and other confessors for centuries have had the same opportunity.

In a further parallel to modern science, the early “Christian psychotherapists” published their observations in confessors’ manuals, which were printed by the hundreds of thousands as early as the late fifteenth century. Astonishingly, in spite of their huge influence, almost no research has been done on the manuals, and not a single one has been translated from Latin to English.<sup>2</sup> Those manuals contain abundant evidence of sins producing destructive results. This article suggests that there is much to be gained by surveying some of the confessors’ discoveries about sins’ “worldly” punishments.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis set forth here is not new. Claes Ryn long ago noted that America’s elite is becoming ever prouder and that this gradual change in collective personality, or “national character,” is causing many of the problems the country is experiencing. This essay uses the old psychology of sins and virtues to support this observation.<sup>4</sup> Recently, a more popular writer and commentator, Tucker Carlson sharply criticized America’s elite in *The Ship of Fools: How a Selfish Ruling Class Is Bringing America to the Brink of Revolution*. Interestingly, many of the behaviors and attitudes Carlson discusses are much the same as those to be used

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<sup>2</sup> A bibliometric analysis of the confessors’ manuals, which documents their massive influence, can be found in Kari Konkola, *Bibliometrics, Penitence and Psychological Ideas*. This article is linked as Post 1 at [traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com](http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com).

<sup>3</sup> This article relies on early modern English sources. However, English writers cited Catholic confessors’ manuals as their sources on sins’ psychology, and an analysis showed the psychology to be the same.

<sup>4</sup> A summary of Ryn’s argument can be found in his article “Appetite for Destruction” in *The American Conservative*, January 19, 2004. The complete thesis is in Claes Ryn, *America the Virtuous: The Crisis of Democracy and the Quest for Empire* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

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as case-studies of traditional sins in this article. Examples include lust for power, lack of empathy, inability to self-criticize, and the idea that “brutal revenge is the only way to peace.”

This article presents possible religious and psychological explanations for the behaviors Carlson criticizes. It offers the hypothesis that members of America’s modern elite may be justifying their actions with rationalizations inspired by gene-coded urges. Evidence-based arguments have practically no effect on this kind of thinking. The only way to change gene-controlled “rational reasoning” is to encourage people to use their brain to weaken the influence of the flesh on “rational” thinking (see below). This is no easy feat, but it has been accomplished many times in the past.

The use in this article of modern psychology, including evolutionary psychology, will strike many as forcing complex spiritual phenomena into categories that are too rough and mechanistic to capture their complexity and subtlety. Some philosophers are bound to view the terminology and classificatory schemes of “scientific” psychology as simplistic and reductionistic. But the purpose here is not to make sweeping, definitive claims about the overlap or coincidence of traditional religion and modern psychology but to point to apparent similarities that can be fruitfully explored.

### *Christian Psychology*<sup>5</sup>

The Bible repeatedly mentions “the flesh” as the source of sins. Theologians in late medieval and early modern Europe connected the flesh to the animal-like part of human nature. The “beast in man” was a central Christian concept: in the Creation, God gave Adam’s rational brain full control of the beastly flesh’s sinful urges. In the Fall, the beast in man revolted and overthrew the control that had once been given. Thus, because of Adam’s transgression, all of his heirs—i.e., all humans—are now born as slaves in sin, trapped by the animal-like urges of their flesh. Seeing this misery, God took pity and sent his only Son, Christ, down to earth to liberate fallen humans from the effects of Adam’s transgression and from eternal suffering in the fires of hell.

We shall here leave aside the important question whether “the flesh” is best understood as animal-like urges or is better understood as a

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<sup>5</sup> A more detailed discussion of the old psychology of sins and virtues can be found at [traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com](http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com). The site has links to source-evidence that shows the importance of the “beast in man” concept in late medieval and early modern Christianity.

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metaphor for the sinful inclinations of the human heart. Animals do not have the kind of freedom of choice and imaginative range that is distinctive to human beings.

Traditional Christianity's dualistic view of humans as a mind, which is capable of objective, evidence-based, rational thinking, and also as a body subject to animal-like urges, sounds familiar because today's evolutionary psychologists have gravitated to a similar view. The similarity is helpful in explaining the meaning of traditional Christian sins to modern readers: sins can be viewed as humans' gene-coded behaviors. Virtually all animals that live in groups—including *Homo Sapiens*—have a gene-coded drive to dominate, which produces status hierarchies. Christianity's sins of pride and envy can be analyzed as the psychological and behavioral effects of this drive to dominate. Gluttony, anger, and lechery correspond to the feeding, fighting, and sexual drives respectively. Although attributing sin to "the animal" in man may be ultimately unsatisfactory, traditional Christianity's view of the animal-like flesh as the deep source of much of fallen humans' behavior aligns fairly well with the latest scientific discoveries. It is understood that what follows is not so much offered as proof of specific overlap between traditional Christianity and modern psychology as possibly useful evidence of similarities that might alert modern people to the plausibility of older Christian assumptions.

The genetic roots of sin open an intriguing perspective on the practice of confession: in their effort to understand sins, confessors investigated what today resembles and is called the psychology of gene-coded behaviors. Several centuries of research has been done on a subject that evolutionary psychologists are just beginning to study. Arguably, confessors' most important discovery was that, if effective methods are used, genes' influence on human behavior can be almost totally eliminated without harmful side effects. This observation differs drastically from the current scientific paradigm, which sees genetic influence as unchangeable.<sup>6</sup>

The idea that genes can be "overcome"—described by theologians

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, O. E. Wilson's interview in *The Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 2000. Steven Pinker provided another example of the view that we cannot do much about innate behaviors. In discussing various possible scenarios for the future, he noted that we may not be able to predict the technology of future society, but we know humans are going to be the same as they are today. The reason we can be so certain about the "human behavior" part of the prediction is that there exists an innate gene-based human nature, which, in Pinker's opinion, we will never be able to change much. Steven Pinker, "Familiar Future," *Prospect* (June 2000), 11-12.

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as crucifying/mortifying the flesh—logically produced the idea that humans exist on a continuum. At one end are people in whom rational thinking reigns supreme, and the desires of flesh/genes are so weak as to be practically non-existent. At the other end of the continuum, flesh/genes totally control behavior. The role of rational thinking is limited to finding ways to gratify flesh/genes' desires and inventing rationalizations to justify those gratifications.

The part of the old Christian psychology of sins/flesh/genes that caused most concern were descriptions of a phenomenon that theologians described with the expression "passions extinguish the light of reason" and which today might be called "gene-cognition interaction." In the old terminology, "passions" were the mechanism through which the flesh/genes influenced the mind's conscious part. This influence was thought to be massive, because passions could unconsciously control all areas of the mind: instinctive emotional reactions, prevailing thoughts, fantasies, free associations, self-evident assumptions, and the results of what people honestly believed to be their evidence-based, objective reasoning. Traditional Christianity outfreuded Freud by giving the unconscious far more power than even Freud would do. Fortunately, the mind's conscious part could be trained to detect passions' normally unconscious influence.<sup>7</sup> Some people had much better awareness of their deep motivations than others.

Even though they have similar views of human nature, traditional Christianity and modern evolutionary psychology disagree sharply concerning specifics. Most evolutionary psychologists believe that innate human behaviors are beneficial. They therefore advocate gratifying our "natural" desires. This assumption seems to be derived from Darwin's theory, which posits that our gene-coded behaviors have been selected over hundreds of millennia of the struggle for survival. These behaviors must have made the individuals carrying them better able to survive; i.e., the behaviors must be advantageous. Christian psychology, however, abounds with evidence that our "innate" behaviors produce catastrophic effects. Indeed, the "passions extinguish the light of reason" assumption implies that the two parts of human nature are inimical. The brain's information-processing capability, which is *Homo Sapiens'* special evolutionary advantage, can operate effectively only when flesh/genes

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed description of how this self-analysis was done can be found in vol. 2 of the forthcoming *The Psychology of Traditional Christian Sins and Virtues*. For publication details, see <http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com/p/page-map-of-this-sites-material-on.html> (Retrieved 07-23-2019).

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have been greatly weakened.

A few evolutionary psychologists question or reject the idea that our genes' influence is positive. Richard Dawkins has argued in *The Selfish Gene* that genes are inherently "selfish," but also that humans should use their reasoning capability to revolt against their genes.<sup>8</sup> The call for rebellion made Dawkins's position as one of the sharpest critics of Christianity rather ironic. Considering his religious youth, he might have noticed the element of agreement between his thinking and that of Christianity: Combining his terminology with Christianity's, God sent Christ down to earth to enable (fallen) humans to revolt against their genes. The disagreements are in the specifics: (1) there is far more to genes' dangers than just "selfishness" (see below); and (2) revolting against genes is far more difficult than Dawkins seemed to assume.

Many Americans are already aware of some of the confessors' discoveries about the dangers of sins. Some of this unintentional theological insight comes from the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who based his famous treatise *The Leviathan* on the idea that humans have an innate, highly asocial lust for power. Hobbes took his view of human nature and the socially destructive effects of the lust for power from the early modern English religious psychology of pride, but this "original source" has been overlooked.<sup>9</sup> As a result, students of Hobbes have ignored or underestimated two crucially important aspects of the drive for power:

(1) The lust for power had many effects that rendered the urge counterproductive to the person. Instead of achieving power and fame, proud people commonly ended up in misery and shame.

(2) The main aim of 17th-century English Protestantism was to root out of people pride/lust for power and to replace this sin with the Christian virtue of humility.<sup>10</sup> Including this possibility would have undermined Hobbes's philosophical reasoning. If humans' asocial lust for power can be ameliorated, then the need for a brutal ruler with absolute power is reduced.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 215.

<sup>9</sup> A more detailed discussion of Hobbes can be found in Post 2 of [traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com](http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com) (retrieved 07-23-2019). The discussion includes a bibliometric analysis that shows that Hobbes had minuscule influence in seventeenth-century England.

<sup>10</sup> Christians in early modern England took humility and contentment very seriously indeed. For a detailed description of how these virtues were understood at the time see Kari Konkola, "Meek Imperialists: The Meaning of Humility in Early Modern England," *Trinity Journal*, Volume 28:1 (Spring 2007), 3 ff. What looks like a bootlegged version of this article seems to be available on the net at <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/.../humility-in-17th-century-england> (Retrieved on 10-04-2018).

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Traditional Christian morality has been fading in America, especially since the 1960s. One should expect that with the lessening of efforts to control flesh/genes and their sins, such as pride, envy, and lechery, they should have become stronger. The U.S. population should be moving toward the continuum's "beastly" end. The destructive effects of sins/flesh/genes about which confessors warned should be intensifying. We may give a brief summary of some of the destructive effects described in old psychologies of sins, and then survey today's America to see if the asocial attitudes predicted on the basis of theory are indeed becoming more widespread and more intense.

This way of discussing the old Christian psychology makes traditional sins relevant to modern readers prone to scientific thinking while describing sins as they were presented historically. Sinful passions operated unconsciously, and the first step toward overcoming them was getting people to notice their corrupt motives. English preachers called this discovery "sight of sin," and they induced this discovery by using a special form of preaching called "detailed and particular application." A sin was first explained in a general way using Biblical examples. This was followed by a very detailed description of how that sin manifested itself in everyday lives. The nuanced description forced people to notice the sin within themselves.

[T]he most effectual means to wound men's consciences for sin, is to charge them with their special sins, whereof they are guilty: not in general to reprove sin, but to rip up men's consciences, to come to particulars, to tell men of their particular sins and impieties: as Nathan did David in the Parable of the Sheep; 'Thou art the man that has done this thing . . . unless men are thus dealt withal, we see that self-love will make men put off to another: That is a good lesson for such a man, I would he had heard it, and so clear themselves . . . It is the duty of the Minister to press men's consciences with their sins in particular, swearing, lying, whoredome, drunkennes, ignorance, profaneness, &c.

[T]he ministry that God has sanctified to convert sinners, and whereby he has been wont for to work most effectually, is such as applies the Word particularly, such as boldly and plainly reproves sin; and that the very life and power of preaching, consists in this . . . . Till our sins are effectually discovered to us, we will never seek salvation seriously, and in good earnest.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The first paragraph comes from Samuel Smith's *David's Repentance: Or, A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the 51. Psalme* (London, 1620), 38-39. The second comes from Arthur Hildesham's *CLII Lectures upon Psalme LI* (London, 1635), 52. For another description see Thomas Hooker, *The Soule's Preparation for Christ, or, a Treatise of Contrition* (London, 1632), 66.



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The goal of the detailed and particular application was for a good pastor to “preach men into the knowledge of themselves.”<sup>12</sup> The necessary first step was to break people’s mistaken self-confidence.

Owing to sins’ psychological defenses, the normal reaction to the detailed and particular application and resulting awareness of one’s personal corruptions was rage:

The word of God is quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart . . . . Hence it is that faithful plain-dealing ministers are commonly hated and persecuted by the ungodly, especially by the great ones and honorable sinners . . . . O how tender are the carnal persons about this self! How quickly do they feel, if a minister do but touch them! How impatiently do they smart, if he meddles with the galled place, and *plainly opens their most disgraceful sins* . . . . They fret and fume at the sermon, and go home with passion in their hearts and reproaches in their mouths against the minister.<sup>13</sup>

Fascinatingly, preachers in early modern England regarded the furious reaction as positive feedback. The hatred signified that the meaning of the sin was communicated effectively because people were noticing their formerly unconscious corruptions. The old standard of success can be used here: if the detailed applications that follow feel insulting and make you furious, those reactions show you are beginning to know traditional Christian sins and to notice in yourself vices/character flaws that until now have managed to hide themselves from your conscious thinking.<sup>14</sup>

### *Extreme Sensitivity to Criticism*

One aspect of the sin of pride (in today’s terms, describable as the gene-coded drive to dominate) was an intense concern for esteem. Proud people had a strong sensitivity to what others thought of them. They experienced anything that diminished them in others’ eyes—in-

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen More, *The Wise Gospel Preacher* (London, 1650), 109-110. Thomas Hooker in *The Application of Redemption*, (London, 1656), I, 210-214, also made the same point: “powerful Ministry . . . discovers the secrets of sin, makes known the close passages of the soul to itself, and that in the ugliness thereof.”

<sup>13</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Self-denial*, in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, ed. by William Orme (London: James Duncan, 1830), vol. X, 341-346. (Emphasis added to highlight Baxter’s description of what the preacher did.) Baxter was the spiritual father of the non-conformists and, measured by published editions, easily the most popular religious writer in early modern England.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed discussion of the preaching methods used in early modern England to get people to notice their sins/unconscious motivations can be found in post 6 of [traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com](http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com) (Retrieved on 07-23-2019).



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cluding all criticism—as instinctively unpleasant and shameful—a loss of face. When pride grew strong, they became paranoid, seeing insults everywhere.

[A] proud man takes all things as heinous or intolerable that are said or done against him . . . . Pride is a most impatient sin: there is no pleasing a proud person, without a great deal of wit, and care, and diligence. You must come about them as you do about straw or gunpowder with a candle.

[Pride] is so contentious a sin, that it makes men firebrands in the societies where they live . . . the missing of a word, or a look, or a compliment, will catch on their hearts, as a spark on gunpowder.<sup>15</sup>

[L]et a proud man be admonished though never so mildly and lovingly, he looks on it as a disgrace. And therefore instead of confessing or amending the fault, he falls to reproaching his reprover as an over-busy or censorious person, and for that greatest and most precious of kindness, looks upon him as his enemy.<sup>16</sup>

Traditional Christian psychology would expect that in modern America sensitivity about esteem will grow, and will manifest itself as an inability to accept helpful criticism. This prediction from theory would anticipate an increased concern for “microaggressions” and the need for safe-space rules. The phobia of criticism that motivates these behaviors is surely related to what was described centuries ago as a branch of pride. It is growing stronger today. The appearance of microaggression and safe-space rules has been increasing as could have been predicted.

The Bible condemns pride as the sin of the devil as well as the ultimate cause of the Fall and sin’s entry into the world. Early modern religious psychologists added to the Bible’s condemnation by pointing to numerous other harmful effects. One of these stemmed from the instinctive hatred of criticism. This emotional reaction prevented the proud from acknowledging their errors, and this inability made it impossible to correct their flaws. Proud people could not improve, because pride’s instinctive rage at criticism disabled the ability to improve that their exceptional brain otherwise would have given them. The paralysis applied to pride itself, making this sin/character-flaw especially difficult to cure.

[Pride] hinders the discovery of itself. It drives away the light. It hates

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<sup>15</sup> The first quotation comes from Richard Baxter, *Christian Ethics*, in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (London: James Duncan, 1830), III, 295. The second comes from Baxter’s *Directions against Pride, and for Humility in Practical Works*, III, 46-48.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (London, 1663), 139.

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reproof. It will not give the sinner leave to see his pride, when it is reproof; nor to confess it if he sees it . . . Even while he hears all the signs of pride, he will not see it in himself. *When he feels his hatred of reproof, and knows that this is a sign of pride in others*, yet he will not know it in himself . . . when he is spitting the venom of pride against the reprover, he perceives not that he is proud: this venom is his nature, and therefore is not felt, nor troublesome. If all the town or the congregation should note him as notoriously proud, yet he himself, that should know himself, will not observe it.

Pride is the defense not only of itself, but of every other sin in the heart or life. For it hates reproof and keeps off the remedy; it hides, and extenuates, and excuses the sin.<sup>17</sup>

The phobia of criticism that sensitizes people to microaggression differs starkly from the attitude found in traditional Christian morality. The Touch of Grace reversed fallen humans' instinctive emotional reactions. Truly humble Christians felt the same pleasure at criticism and ridicule that proud people felt at praise and admiration.<sup>18</sup> A virtual delight in learning things negative about oneself made people interested in their flaws, and the ensuing attention understandably led to correcting the weaknesses. In humble Christians, human nature's feedback mechanism operated at full power, and this inevitably produced a personality sharply different from that of the proud.

The traditional Christian psychology of sins and virtues opens to modern people a refreshingly novel perspective on microaggression: the problem is not in what is being said by critics. The problem is with the people who cannot tolerate criticism. They have an extremely dangerous character-flaw—theologians used the word “sin.”

## ***(2) Perceiving Life as Struggle for Status***

When humans moved close to the continuum's animal end, and their gene-coded drive to dominate/sin of pride grew strong, people began to perceive life as a struggle for power and esteem. This status-focused thinking was not produced by conscious reasoning. The idea seemed to a proud mind's conscious part so self-evidently true and natural that it needed neither justification nor supporting evidence—“attitude” is probably the most accurate term to describe this orientation. The status-

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Baxter, *Directions against Pride, and for Humility*, in *Practical Works*, III, 48-49. The italics are mine and are used to emphasize the instinctive anger at criticism and the role of this emotional reaction as a sign of pride.

<sup>18</sup> The effects of the conversion process and its associated Touch of Grace are described in detail in vol. 2 of the forthcoming *The Psychology of Traditional Christian Sins and Virtues*.

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competitiveness led in modern times to the belief that the pursuit of equality—a way of reducing the power of others—was necessary. For the proud, this “self-evidently correct” ideal formed the very foundation for “rational” thinking.

The influence of flesh/genes on “rational” thinking made it hard for people to understand how anyone could disagree with them. This created a problem for the proud: how to explain that some people believed the pursuit of power and esteem was meaningless? The common way to deal with this contrary evidence was to dismiss doubters as simpletons who had been misled. Marxists called it “false consciousness.” Workers had been fooled by capitalists into believing they were not being exploited.

Using the old way of thinking, the modern United States has been moving toward the continuum’s animal end, and, just as Christian psychology predicted, the attitude that life is a struggle for status and power is spreading rapidly, as is the associated concern for equality. This spread has revived the need to explain why some people do not see the pursuit of status, esteem, and power as central to their lives. Feminists have adopted Marxism’s term “false consciousness” to denote women who find status irrelevant. They believe those women are unaware or stupid and have allowed themselves to be brainwashed into acting against their own best interests. They would attribute the same failing to anyone who adheres to traditional Christian humility.

Christian psychology has a ready answer to the “false consciousness” criticism. The competitive, status-conscious attitude is not the result of truly rational thinking. That attitude and its supporting reasoning are rationalizations produced unconsciously by fallen human nature’s innate, animal-like, sinful and dangerous drive to dominate. That is the sin of pride. Feminists’ obsession with status and esteem can thus be criticized as the consciousness and “rationality” of animals, such as the strictly hierarchical chimpanzees. From this perspective—a perspective supported by some evolutionary psychologists’ discoveries—the “true consciousness” of Marxists and feminists is an animal-like, irrational, asocial, destructive attitude far beneath the dignity of human beings capable of truly rational reasoning. (Cautionary note: for the old theologians, the main criticism would have been that this kind of competitive attitude was a branch of pride/envy, the sin of the devil and the ultimate source of all evil. Humans manifesting this attitude were incarnate devils, who would cause endless problems for themselves and those around them and whose company was to be avoided. The theo-

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gians were aware of the similarities between pride and animal behavior, but what the “evolutionary psychology perspective” adds can only be used to support, not displace, the Bible.)

Moderns will argue that people in early modern England, particularly women, must have been terribly oppressed because there was nothing to protect them against exploitation. In reality, traditional Christian morality imposed strict controls on human conduct intended to avert oppression, but those controls operated in a way that is unfamiliar today.

The most important part of pride, in the old view, was an unconscious desire to control and dominate others. One of the duties of the husband and wife in a marriage was to observe and point out to each other any sins they noticed. If the husband was overbearing and domineering, it would have been the wife’s religious duty to warn him that he had not reined in his pride and that his soul was in danger of roasting in hell for all eternity.

Overcoming pride meant eliminating at its deepest source the urge to control others. Conversion with its Touch of Grace mortified the flesh/genes of the evolutionary psychologists, and this eliminated from humans the desire to dominate. The result was a personality that was instinctively humble and meek and thus easy to get along with. In traditional Christianity, humble behavior was a sign of manliness.<sup>19</sup> Religious psychologists had discovered how to control love by willpower. A special kind of willing was basic to health in the soul. This capability was applied to all aspects of life, including marriage, and the ability to keep oneself in love through the right kind of willing explained people’s ability to experience life-long, happy marriages.

Today’s extreme status-consciousness highlights the deep psychological level on which the flesh/genes—comparable to traditional Chris-

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<sup>19</sup> This view followed logically from the idea that a Christian’s most important task was to overcome the beastly, sinful flesh and its passions, particularly pride. Truly manly men had achieved this feat: “. . . be well assured, the stronger the passions are, the greater weaknesses they are; for he is not the strongest, nor wisest man that shows most passion, but he that subdues it most.” Timothy Rogers, *Good News from Heaven, of a Safe Conduct, Discovering Many Treasons Against Everyone’s Soul* (London, 1627), 193. One of the many writers making this point was Thomas à Kempis, who in his immensely popular *The Imitation of Christ* repeated four times the observation that truly masculine men had overcome their flesh and its passions: “Sometimes . . . you must use violence, and resist manfully thy sensual appetite, not regarding what the flesh would, or would not; but rather taking pains that even perforce it may be made subject to the Spirit.” Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ*, (New Canaan: Keats Publishing Inc., 1973), 99. For the other observations, see pp. 33, 56, and 110-111.

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tian sins—operates. After all, how rational is it really to perceive life as a struggle for power and esteem? This question used to be well-known, because the status-obsessed attitude contrasted starkly with Christian morality. The virtues of humility and contentment explicitly countered the habit of fallen humans to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others:

What wrong is it to me, if another be wittier, handsomer, and stronger than I? I have never the less of either, because he has more. That degree which he has above me, was not taken from me: And so, if he excell me in any virtue; or, as a reward of that virtue, if he be better thought of, find greater favour, and be preferred before me, 'tis but as it should be. He has what he deserves, and I am not injured by it.<sup>20</sup>

### *(3) Urge to Control Everybody and Everything*

The drive to dominate/sin of pride gave fallen humans an intense, unconscious urge to rule everybody and everything. Those suffering from this urge usually rationalized it by telling themselves that they acted on a virtuous, selfless desire to help their fellow humans. This excuse did not fool Christian experts on sins' depth-psychology. They saw the real motivation as lust for power and admiration:

Some of [the ambitious] that think themselves most cunning in their trade, will not plainly profess ambition, but mask, or shadow it with other colours, whereby they hope they may more safely pass, undescried, undiscovered. They will propound their own merit and ability, or defect in others, and protest they have no particular ends, but public reformation; for which only cause, they are content to devote, and enthrall themselves; when the truth is, the spur that pricks them forward to these designs, is glory, and command above others.<sup>21</sup>

The old psychology of sins leads to this prediction: we should see in Americans a growing lust for power. This prediction from theory—again—agrees well with the observed evidence. The growth of a strong, centralized state that has the power to control everybody and everything is just what should be expected. The words “control” and “rule” are of course rarely used. “Help” and “protect” sound more attractive. “To serve” is another popular camouflage. Traditional American limited government is an anathema to pride-induced “rationality.” Private property forms an intolerable obstacle to the lust for unlimited power.

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<sup>20</sup> William Aspin, *The Envious Man's Character* (London, 1684), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Grey Brydges, *Observations and Discourses* (London, 1620), 21-22. Brydges assumes that the proud person is consciously lying in describing his motive. However, in many cases the proud honestly believed their explanation.

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The dismantling of private property receives additional support from envy.

Growing pride/desire to dominate is only one manifestation of a human's shift toward the animal-rational continuum's beastly end. This slide produces numerous other harmful effects: (1) loss of empathy; (2) loss of the ability to perform self-criticism; (3) quarrelsomeness; (4) stupidity caused by a combination of the passions extinguishing the light of reason and loss of the ability to learn from mistakes; and (5) corruptibility caused by growing inability to control the ever stronger gene-coded urges. The concatenation of these traits produces an exceedingly unfortunate result: the most ill-informed, asocial, and dishonest people are the most eager to control others and thus to become active in politics. Their aversion to self-criticism makes the incompetent certain they know what is best for everybody.

Pride/desire to dominate is not only an exceptionally dangerous sin. This urge is also very difficult to control because there are humans who really do need help. This inherent uncertainty about who or how many they are makes unwarranted pride hard to detect. Where exactly is the line between helping the truly needy and trying to dominate people perfectly capable of taking care of themselves? And when is an expressed desire to help merely cover for overpowering political opponents. The blurred boundary between helping and subjugating makes pride easy to rationalize. This greatly complicates efforts to control the sin, because those afflicted with it are especially prone to self-deception. They fool themselves into actually believing that they are selflessly trying to help others. This belief makes the proud perceive those who would limit their pursuit of power as heartless; their opponents are trying to prevent them from helping their needy fellow humans. This perception triggers hostility and intensifies efforts to overcome restraints on their pursuit of power.

The lack of empathy on the part of the proud also gives rise to a belief that those ostensibly needing their help are so incompetent that they cannot take care of themselves. The helpers assume that their prescriptions are much superior to the decisions of those they purport to help. These assumptions are rarely stated explicitly, but they are apparent in body language and slips of the tongue suggesting a condescending view of "ordinary" people. They live in "flyover states" or are "deplorables." The helped usually detect some of the contempt in which they are held, which, understandably, triggers their ire.

An example of the complications inherent in the pride/desire to

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dominate can be seen in families with overprotective parents. From their own perspective, the parents are working selflessly for their children. The children may at some point say, "Thank you very much for the help you have given, but now, please, stop meddling in my life. I want to make my own decisions." Overprotective parents see this as ingratitude or incompetence that prevents the children from seeing the benefits they receive from their wise parental guidance.

The old Christian psychology of pride and the drive to dominate helps explain President Trump's success. The psychology of Americans is the same as in families with overprotective parents. Politicians in Washington see themselves as working selflessly to help and protect Americans. Most of them probably even believe this rationalization. Like overprotective parents, politicians cannot understand why Americans are not grateful for all of their rulers' altruistic work. The less-than-enthusiastic response is attributed to lack of knowledge and/or stupidity: "Americans do not understand what we in Washington are doing for them."

The 2016 election provided evidence that the American political elite lack genuine empathy. Time after time the mass media and established commentators and politicians expressed sentiments of this kind: "Trump cannot win." "Trump does not stand a chance." "Trump is a clown." "Trump will ruin the Republican party." There was little or no awareness of popular hostility due to perceived neglect of or contempt for ordinary Americans and the associated efforts by elites to keep control of the population. That America's intelligentsia and political establishment still have difficulty understanding why several states assumed to be safe for Clinton did not vote for Clinton is testimony to modern education's failure to teach self-knowledge and self-criticism. Proud people do not acknowledge their flaws and cannot improve by trial-and-error. The behavior of the U.S. elite fits predictions derived from traditional Christian psychology.

Another psychological block created by the sin of pride/gene-coded drive to dominate deserves to be noted: in the Bible, God not only is omnipotent but all-knowing. The omnipotence necessitates omniscience because, if He did not know everything, God's omnipotent decisions could be wrong. But what the Bible regards as characteristics of God, pride attributes to man. A claim to omniscience is inherent in the lust for power, and it can be observed not least in academia. Honest scientists are today embarrassed by once hugely influential "scientific truths" that are now widely acknowledged to have been erroneous. Examples



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are Skinnerian behaviorism and the Mead/Malinovski idealization of aboriginal cultures. Yet many scientists simultaneously manage to assume—though it is rarely stated explicitly—that current widely held paradigmatic theories, for example, regarding climate, cannot possibly be seriously wrong. That scientists a few centuries from now may be laughing at beliefs now considered incontestable seems inconceivable.

#### ***(4) Assumption that Brutal Punishment Is the Only Way to Peace***

As humans approach the animal end of the continuum, gene-coded urges make persons see the fear of brutal revenge as the only effective way to respond to insults and injuries. “Rational” thinking produces the idea that the only way to protect oneself from being attacked by others is to threaten harsh responses. Theologians generally discussed the specifics of this reasoning under the heading of sin of hate/anger.

The old theory would predict adoption of the “brutal punishment brings peace” attitude among the U.S. foreign policy elite and would be depressingly accurate. During the last decade and a half, America’s leaders have used what they imagine to be “rational thinking” to sow death and destruction throughout the Middle East. The number of innocent humans America’s highly educated elite has killed or maimed is in the hundreds of thousands, and millions have been driven from their homes due to American action. Many once flourishing cities have been turned into rubble, and trillions of American taxpayers’ dollars have been spent on Middle East wars. These immensely costly efforts—both in lives and in money—have made things worse for those affected. Americans and others would probably face a far smaller risk of terrorism and disorder if Saddam Hussein was still in power in Iraq and Gaddafi in Libya.

From this study’s perspective, a sad aspect of the atrocities caused by the U.S. elite is that many who ordered those actions call themselves Christians and believe themselves to be such. Christ explicitly taught the opposite of the attitudes of these people: to turn the other cheek, forgive wrongs and love one’s enemies. Although Christianity never prescribed pacifism and general meekness as appropriate to politics and foreign affairs in a fallen world, it strongly condemned belligerence. There can be little doubt that, with regard to making the world safer for Americans, and for others, adhering to the kind of prudence and restraint that the Christian tradition counseled would have been a superior response to the 9/11 attack.

Theologians have contrasted the attitude of “brutal revenge brings

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peace” with Christ’s “turn the other cheek,” although in awareness that in a fallen world circumstances rarely permit literally following this admonition. They have believed that brutal retaliation does not bring peace, but could start an endless cycle of revenge. What one side sees as a just response to attack is seen by the other as a grievous injury that must be revenged. That really harsh action tends to generate self-perpetuating conflict seems to receive little consideration in current American thinking. In line with the U.S. elite’s apparent lack of empathy, there is little awareness of the possibility that at the funeral of nearly every person whom U.S. forces kill, several of that person’s friends and relatives may decide to die fighting to revenge that killing—drones are likely to be particularly effective “recruiters.”<sup>22</sup>

At first sight, the idea of using Christ as a role-model in international politics may appear counterintuitive. Yet the idea should not be dismissed lightly. As understood in the context of worldly existence, the spirit of Christ’s teaching was supported by the findings of confessors. Their late Medieval circumstances gave the “religious psychotherapists” better opportunities to investigate the depth-psychology of cycles of revenge than are available to modern scientists. Significantly, violent mortality in Europe seems to have started to decline drastically at the same time as confessors began to operate on a large scale. This raises the possibility that the Christian psychologists were on to something important. Might there be a profound human cost to the psychology of cycles of revenge that we do not today understand and that seem counterintuitive and non-logical to gene-induced “rational” thinking?

To reiterate the proposed blending of medieval and modern terminology, the old theory of flesh/genes sees humans as inhabiting a continuum between the totally rational and the totally animal parts of their nature. We again skip over the complication that, most strictly speaking, human beings do not have a merely animal nature, endowed as they are with self-awareness and freedom of choice. But the old theory of a continuum points to an especially dangerous aspect of the “revenge is the way to peace” reasoning. The condition of the person that produces this reasoning is not stable. From the point of view of the old view of humanity, Americans have been sliding toward the animal end of the continuum, and this slide makes the influence of gene-coded urges grow stronger. With time, the thinking of the quarrelsome and

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<sup>22</sup> For the effect of drone warfare on the recruitment of suicide bombers, see Leila Hudson, Colin S. Owens, and Matt Flannes, “Drone Warfare: Blowback from the New American Way of War,” *Middle East Policy* 18:3 (Fall 2011).

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belligerent—"Everybody is a potential enemy who needs to be kept in place with fear-inducing punishment"—will spread throughout politics, and soon a conflict-prone attitude will permeate all interpersonal relationships. As a result, compromise and cooperation will diminish or disappear. Conflict and gridlock will become the norm, and society will disintegrate. Unless a way is found to reverse the direction of the movement on the animal-rational continuum, the ever-intensifying cycles of revenge could in a few generations make the United States resemble the countries where we are now trying to do "nation building."

A highly visible example of quarrelsomeness and conflict in American politics is evident in President Trump's use of Twitter to disparage, insult, and shame those who oppose him, but his opponents are no less harsh, indeed, often exceed him in the contempt and hostility that they display. The word "hatred" is frequently appropriate. President Trump can be said to have adapted to a political and journalistic climate in which the elite he calls "the swamp" are intolerant of any real opposition. A few decades ago, this kind of confrontational behavior would have been scorned as unseemly and immoral. Its painfully visible effects are wholly in line with the old theory's prediction. Trump does not seem to understand why so many people oppose virtually everything he tries to do, and why they go out of their way to make sure his presidency will be a failure.

From the point of view of the old Christian psychology, the behavior of the President and his opponents elicits a reaction that can be summarized as "told ya so." An understanding of the pride-caused quarrelsomeness and its society-destroying effects used to be part of folk-psychology:

Pride is the gunpowder of the mind, the family, the church, and state: It maketh men ambitious, and setteth them on striving who shall be the greatest . . . If you (forgetfully) go before him, or overlook him, or neglect a compliment, or deny him something he expected, or speak not honourably of him, much more if you reprove him, and tell him of his faults, you have put fire to the gunpowder, you have broken his peace, and he will break yours, if he can . . . It is a matter of very great difficulty to live peaceably in a family, church, or any society with any one that is very proud . . .<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Baxter, *Christian Politics*, in *Practical Works*, VI, 264-265. Baxter noted that the proud conquerors usually plead higher motives than pride: "Who perhaps when he hath done, will say that he is no tyrant, but maketh the 'bonum publicum' his end; and is kind to men against their wills; and killeth, and burneth, and depopulateth countries, for men's corporal welfare." For additional religious description of the harmful effects of pride and other sinful passions on society see Richard Allestree's popular, *The Causes of the*

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Contrary to the assumptions of the modern theory of self-esteem, the pride-caused quarrelsomeness does not depend on the individual's social status. A person's situation in life only changes the way the sin/character flaw manifests itself:

Every proud man is a plague or burden to the place he lives in: if he gets high, he is a Nabal: a man can scarce speak to him: he thinks all under him are made but to serve his will and honor . . . . If he be an inferior, he scorns at the honor and government of his superiors, and thinks they take too much upon them, and that it is below him to obey. If he is rich, he thinks the poor must all bow to him . . . if he is poor, he envies the rich, and is impatient of the state that God has set him in: if he is learned, he thinks himself an oracle: if unlearned, he despises the knowledge which he wants, and scorns to be taught . . . he is a natural enemy to quietness and peace.<sup>24</sup>

Richard Baxter's descriptions of the proud personality illustrate the relationship between the Bible and early modern English theology. The Bible says, "Only by pride cometh contention" (Prov. 13: 10). English theologians provided much crucially important detail on how the contention was generated. Once people knew these specifics, they began to notice the sin first in others and later in themselves. This "sight of sin" produced efforts to overcome one's pride.

### *(5) Desire to Be God*

Sinking ever deeper into the morass of revenge-cycles is not the only catastrophic effect—in theological terms, God's punishment—of sliding toward the continuum's animal/sinful end. The slide creates, the Christian psychologists contend, a mixture of three character-flaws: lust for power; loss of self-criticism; and loss of empathy. The combination produces an effect that the Bible describes as rooted in the devil's desire to have God's absolute power. Deep down in their hearts all humans share this sinful personality trait, but most of the time the desire to be God remains hidden because people have a limited capability to act on it. However, the urge becomes apparent when people hold positions of power and pride has more on which to feed. Fully in accord with what could have been predicted, the mostly hidden "I want to be God" attitude spread like wildfire among the U.S. political elite a quarter of a century ago, when the collapse of the Soviet Union removed constraints on America's power in the world.

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*Decay of Christian Piety*, (London, 1667), 325-337, and John Shower, *The Present Correction and Reproof of Sins*, (London, 1685), 17.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Baxter, *Directions Against Pride, and for Humility in Practical Works*, III, 65-66.

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The desire to be God rationalized itself in the idea that the U.S. has not only the right but the duty to correct any serious injustice anywhere in the world. This idea appeared in a burst of texts of varying emphasis but with a common theme: the need to exert overwhelming power. One prominent school of interventionism gave humanitarian reasons for using power, for example, Samantha Power's *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (2002), Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Just War against Terror: the Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (2004) and Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter's "A Duty to Prevent."<sup>25</sup> Just as the old theory of flesh/genes predicts, these texts became influential because the thesis was highly attractive to people close to the continuum's animal end. A strong pride/lust for power made them prone to assuming God's position as the Supreme Judge, the one who makes the ultimate decisions about right and wrong and who can punish accordingly.

These texts provide ample illustration of the destruction of restraints placed on the desire for power. One of the most glaring examples is the loss of empathy. This problem is painfully evident when the justification for using power is a "duty to intervene." It is morally necessary. Nothing is said about one important consideration: How will inhabitants of the countries America "saves" respond to U.S. troops invading and killing and then beginning to impose on the inhabitants norms starkly different from those to which they are accustomed? The possibility that the people in the invaded country will rapidly forget their internal quarrels and join together to drive the Americans out is not discussed.

When people move close to the continuum's animal end, gene-coded urges grow so strong that rational thinking and willpower cannot resist them. Some people will do anything to pursue gene-coded goals, such as backstabbing friends, breaking promises and laws, stealing, lying, and killing. Minds controlled by flesh/genes rationalize everything that they desire. Pride's lust to "help" operates in the same way. Obstacles to doing so feel intolerable and must be brushed aside. In the case of the "duty to protect," one obstacle is other countries' national sovereignty, and, just as the old theory would have predicted, this form of the lust for power easily justifies ignoring hindrances.

In a historical perspective, the abandonment of national sovereignty has had devastating effects. The notion of national sovereignty developed by trial-and-error. People learned from the horrors of the Thirty Years War. Large areas of Germany were desolated. Some 20 to 40 percent of the population died, and the country's once flourish-

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<sup>25</sup> *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2004), 136-150.

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ing economic and intellectual life suffered badly. These developments helped convince people that outsiders' invading to help a segment of a country's population was a cure far worse than the disease. The notion of national sovereignty became efficacious in the peace of Westphalia in the mid-seventeenth century. Astonishingly, the "duty to protect" advocates have managed to block from their minds a lesson that was learned at terrible cost. As a result, large areas of the Middle East can be compared to Germany circa 1650.

As discussed above, pride / drive to dominate sharply limits the ability to perform self-criticism. Jesus calls attention to this psychological block in the description of people who can "see "the splinter" in others' eyes, but not the "beam" in their own. Religious psychologists were thoroughly familiar with this phenomenon. Proud people in particular could point out the most minute details of other people's pride, yet were incapable of noticing in themselves the very same sinful behaviors.

[The proud] easily see other man's failings; but the very same or worse, they justify in themselves. Their own passions, their own overreachings or injurious dealings, their own ill words are smoothed over as harmless things, when other men's are aggravated as intolerable crimes. Another is judged by them unfit for human societies, for less than that which they can not endure to see themselves reprov'd for, and will hardly be convinced that it is any fault.<sup>26</sup>

America's highly educated elite provides an example of the splinter vs. beam phenomenon. The elite-controlled mainstream media repeatedly and ferociously attack Russia's President Vladimir Putin. He is a cruel, dangerous warmonger. Putin has killed people. Yet one may ask whether what Putin has done is worse than the killing and other suffering that the U.S. elite itself has inflicted. What about Iraq, Libya, Syria? The inability of this group to see "the beam in their own eye" is testimony to the fragility of the much praised rational thinking of humans. The blinkers worn are especially frightening because those wearing them are very probably not consciously lying. The inability to see their own flaws is unconscious.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Baxter, *Directions against Pride, and for Humility in Practical Works*, III, 33. Thomas Hooker described this phenomenon in his *The Application of Redemption* (London, 1656), II, 75: "each man will be ready to be Eagle eyed into other mens occasions, and can easily enquire, and question, and determine, and say, others have done thus, and so, here such have fallen, therein such and such have failed, but no man says, what have I done?" See also William Perkins, *An Exhortation to Repentance: Two sermons on Zephaniah Chap. 2. verse 1.2.* (London, 1605), 55.

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The depth and scope of the character flaw of pride was described time after time by Christian psychologists and long before them in the Bible. The pervasiveness of this human trait raises a troubling possibility which needs to be investigated, that normal, that is to say, fallen, humans may have a strong, gene-coded, unconscious psychological aversion to self-criticism. It may be that without special—and in the beginning quite unpleasant—training, people cannot utilize their great potential to improve by feedback. The possibility of this kind of innate psychological block highlights the significance of Christianity's most important virtue—humility. A central component of the traditional notion of humility was a certain feeling of pleasure, mixed with pain, at being criticized and even ridiculed. Counterintuitively, this reaction may be very important and beneficial indeed.

Advocates of “the duty to intervene” show a vague awareness that something may be wrong somewhere in their thinking. Elhstain discusses with bafflement what she regards as the strange Christian habit of thinking that people can be responsible for the disasters that happen to them. But Elhstain gets her religion badly wrong. The idea that sins can have disastrous consequences for people who commit them is a Jewish one. The Old Testament makes the point clearly and emphatically: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18); “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud” (Prov. 15:25); “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (Prov. 16:5); “. . . the proud that are cursed” (Psalm 119:21). (Fascinatingly, according to modern attitudes, the Old Testament “blames the victim.”)

Christians—at least early modern Christians—merely added details and supporting evidence to the old Jewish argument. For example, the Old Testament sees pride's disastrous effects as God's punishments. Early modern theologians added a large number of psychological and sociological causalities to “God's punishment.” Some of these “secular causalities” have been described on the preceding pages, but the old writings encompass far more of them than could be discussed here.

### *Religion and Science: Controlling the Uncontrollable*

In his 1975 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, Donald Campbell argued that strict, ascetic religions may be beneficial, because they control harmful behaviors that are innate in human nature. Campbell arrived at his pro-religion view via hard-line Darwinist reasoning. He began with the basic tenet of evolutionary psy-



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chology that humans are born with innate, evolution-produced behavioral traits. Campbell then hypothesized that evolution selected those traits because they were beneficial for humans living in hunter-gatherer groups. He next noted that the lifestyles of some humans experienced a drastic change when they began to live in urban societies.<sup>27</sup> Campbell's theory grew out of the observation that the innate behaviors that promoted the survival of wandering groups of hunter-gatherers may not be suitable for people living a sedentary life in large communities. Religion then became a form of cultural learning, the purpose of which was to control the formerly beneficial but now destructive innate behaviors.<sup>28</sup>

Campbell supported his hypothesis by several observations: first, there are remarkable similarities in the rules espoused by all known urban religions. All of them require people to suppress numerous behavioral traits that seem to be innate. The list of prohibited behaviors usually includes selfishness, pride, greed, dishonesty, covetousness, cowardice, lust, and wrath.<sup>29</sup>

Second, urban religions have had several hundred generations to "study" the effects of their "recipes for living." Campbell applied to this time period what he called "a hard-line neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory" of "blind variation and systematic selective retention."<sup>30</sup> On the basis of this theoretical model, he argued that the rules contained in successful religious traditions very probably have been selected by the struggle for survival to produce a human nature "optimized" to perform well as a productive member of a large, stable society.

One of the most intriguing parts of Campbell's argument was the idea that the reasons for the rules are generally not transmitted with the moral tradition. People who adhere to religious morality follow the rules because they are commands laid down by an all-knowing, infinitely wise supreme authority. Campbell regarded this unquestioning obedience as highly useful because individual members of a culture cannot possibly have the knowledge or the long-term perspective which a religious tradition has accumulated over long periods of evolutionary selection from different "recipes for living." Campbell eloquently

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<sup>27</sup> According to current archeological paradigm, this change was based on the introduction of farming and in evolutionary time scale it is very recent because it took place only some 10,000-12,000 years ago.

<sup>28</sup> Donald T. Campbell, "On the Conflicts Between Biological and Social Evolution and Between Psychology and Moral Tradition," *American Psychologist*, December 1975, 1103-1126. For a summary of Campbell's thesis see pp. 1103-1104, 1114-1120.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1104.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

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expressed the superiority of this cultural learning over individual observation and reasoning by describing religion as “a tradition wiser than any of the people transmitting it.”<sup>31</sup>

Considering that he presented his thesis as a Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association, it is surprising to find Campbell extending the warning about questioning religious norms to scientists. This extension followed logically from his description of religion as “. . . recipes for living that have been evolved, tested, and winnowed through hundreds of generations of human social history. On purely scientific grounds, these recipes for living might be regarded as better tested than the best of psychology’s and psychiatry’s speculations on how lives should be lived.”<sup>32</sup>

Campbell’s suggestion not to question this evolution-collected wisdom was supported by his personal experience, which had convinced him that the scientific method is incapable of overcoming the influence of our innate, evolution-developed urges: “It is certainly my impression, after 40 years of reading psychology, that psychologists almost invariably side with self-gratification over traditional restraints.”<sup>33</sup> If questioning of the rules is allowed, our “rational” thinking will inevitably produce evidence-supported, convincing-looking reasons to abandon them. We may be greatly underestimating the human brain’s irrationality, and much of scientific research may be little more than a glorified search for rationalizations to justify pursuing our genes’ unconscious desires. Campbell described this process in some detail: “Of course, from my theory, individuals should be overeager for liberation from the oppressive yoke of moral culture, more eager than is good for society as a whole, and psychology’s teaching may just provide a rationalization. . . . As fellow animals . . . psychologists too should be overeager to discover and believe antitraditional, antirepressive theories.”<sup>34</sup>

Campbell does not seem to have developed his defense of religion beyond the first public presentation, which may have something to do with the uproar caused by the argument. The speech was widely called “The Original Sin Address,” and responses to it carried headlines such as “Original Sin Rides Again.”<sup>35</sup> Campbell’s failure to pursue the idea

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 1107.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1103.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1120.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1121.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1116. The responses to Campbell’s thesis were collected and published as a separate article. See Lauren G. Wispe and James N. Thompson, eds. “The War Between the Words, Biological Versus Social Evolution and Some Related Issues,” *American Psychologist*

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in depth is unfortunate. His theory gives rise to this prediction: areas that adopted strict forms of religion mortifying flesh/genes should have been Darwinistically more fit and thus successful. This prediction can be tested against historical evidence. The strictest form of the ascetic, flesh/genes mortifying variant of Christianity can be observed in four areas: Calvinist Geneva, Calvinist Netherlands, Puritan England, and the Puritan colonies in America. These areas share a “constellation of experiences” that are rare in history: First there was a burst of religious fanaticism, which in the Netherlands and in England led to a civil war, but this turbulence was followed by several centuries of stability, openness, tolerance, individual freedoms, representative political systems, scientific and technological progress, improving standards of living, remarkable political and economic success, and domestic peace—the U.S. civil war being the main exception to this last shared condition. Historical evidence thus supports Campbell’s hypothesis.

The same agreement with Campbell’s hypothesis can be found inside Catholicism. The strictest application of Christianity’s flesh/genes-overcoming morality in the Catholic countries took place in Northern Italy, where Cardinal Borromeo enforced the counterreformation with exceptional intensity. It may be more than just coincidence that there still exists a sharp division inside Italy and that, if it had been a separate country, Northern Italy would, for example, have one of the highest living standards in the world.

### *Campbell’s Theory and Early Modern England*

The one major difference between Campbell’s hypothesis and England’s historical experience is that, for the latter, the religious effort to control asocial traits in human nature flowed from more than a blind obedience to rules understood as given by an infinitely wise supreme authority. Unquestioning obedience to God was undoubtedly a factor, but the Bible’s commands were supported by a well-developed psychology that explained in great detail the causality through which humans’ innate, sinful urges produced their harmful effects. These detailed causal chains and their supporting psychological theories and observational evidence cannot be found in the Bible. They were probably developed in large part by confessors. Significantly, these additions do not contradict the Bible. They strengthen the latter’s message by covering details on which the Bible is silent, for example the nuances of how sins such as

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(May 1976), 341-388.

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pride, envy, and anger operate in thoughts and emotions.

A second difference centers on the reason why humans' evolution-developed, gene-coded behaviors have become harmful. Campbell's explanation was that people's lifestyles changed drastically with the growth of urban societies. A genetic nature optimized for small groups of wandering hunter-gatherers was unsuitable to life in large, stable communities. Recent archeological research has revealed a second drastic change that offers another possible explanation: it appears that humans' exceptional ability to do abstract, rational thinking may be a recent development in the evolutionary time scale. This ability seems to have developed only some 50,000 years ago.<sup>36</sup> (The oldest anatomically modern humans—i.e., with bone structure the same as ours—to have been found so far are about 200,000 years old.) It is thus possible that evolution has not yet had time to optimize the interface between the increased ability to reason abstractly and the mechanism through which genes control behavior.

This "beta-version firmware" hypothesis is particularly intriguing because most of the destructive effects that Christian psychologists discovered seem to stem from problems in the interaction between humans' gene-coded, animal-like urges and our brain's capacity to do rational, "objective," evidence-based thinking. An example of these problems was the "passions extinguish the light of reason" phenomenon. In people close to the continuum's animal end, strong emotions made truly objective and rational thinking impossible because much sensory evidence felt too unpleasant to take into consideration in reasoning. The same "firmware error" made the drive to dominate counterproductive by blocking self-criticism and, with it, humans' ability to improve via feedback.

The glitch between human nature's two parts highlights the underlying fundamental problem: our conscious reasoning has to overcome the body's destructive gene-coded urges. Yet those urges can powerfully and unconsciously influence the conscious thinking that is supposed to control them. The condition in which the brain is in control of the animal part is thus inherently unstable. Campbell's discovery of this problem—best summed up as 'realizing the full extent of the (fallen) human mind's irrationality'—produced the suggestion not to question urban

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<sup>36</sup> The main proponent of this "sudden change" view of human evolution is Ian Tattersall. For a brief summary of his thesis see *Scientific American* (January 2000), 58-63. For a book-length discussion, see Ian Tattersall, *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998).

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religions' norms. From the perspective of the "warfare between religion and science," this suggestion is most interesting: a distinguished scientist's ruthless use of observation and logical reasoning led him to an eminently scientific, evolutionary-theory-based defense of a view close to Biblical Inerrancy as a guide to moral behavior!

Campbell's personal experience had provided him with abundant evidence that, at least in psychology, the scientific method is not capable of overcoming the genes' unconscious influence. The history of religion shows that scientific research is not the only area where flesh/genes manipulate our conscious reasoning into inventing rationalizations to pursue their goals. In his *The Vain Religion of the Formal Hypocrite*, seventeenth-century England's most popular religious writer, Richard Baxter, used this same psychology of flesh/genes to predict that the traditional sins would disappear from Christianity. Baxter described flesh/genes' influence on humans by comparing the life of religious people to the condition of corn between two millstones. On one side, conscience demands religiosity and supports this demand by threats of eternal damnation in hellfire. On the other side, the flesh hates being constrained. The natural solution to this dilemma is the invention of Christianities which contain enough formalities, rituals, church-goings and Bible-studies to satisfy conscience's demand to be religious, while simultaneously finding ways to avoid restricting the desires of the flesh. Baxter disparagingly referred to these Christianities as "religions hypocrites create to save themselves from religion." Baxter's prediction turned out to be accurate. The traditional sins have in fact disappeared from religion as he he predicted.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the old sins have not merely disappeared; they are today in the process of turning into Christian virtues. Adherents of "prosperity theology" worship the greed of old, and Schuller's *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* idealizes what used to be the sin of pride. The evidence suggests that flesh/genes/sins can manipulate theologians just as easily as they can mislead scientists.

As mentioned above, philosophers will caution against using the terms and classifications of evolutionary psychology to indicate the plausibility of traditional religious beliefs regarding sins. Human life and consciousness are too complex and multi-faceted to be captured in the net of scientific explanation. Too much that is necessary to under-

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<sup>37</sup> An abridged and annotated edition of Baxter's *The Vain Religion of the Formal Hypocrite* will be available soon. Check [traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com](http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com) for the publication date.

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standing our full humanity slips through. There are nevertheless intriguing parallels between the old findings of Christian psychology and those of modern evolutionary psychology. These may incline people of modern scientific temperament to take a second look at old observations that seem to have anticipated their own.

### *Postscript: In Their Words*

The Christian morality described in this article differs so much from today's religions and modern scientific mainstream that readers may doubt its historical accuracy. Fortunately, the interest in digitizing old books has made many key sources available on the Internet. Below are links to three influential seventeenth-century English discussions of pride and humility. Readers are invited to decide for themselves what traditional Christians would have said about today's America—particularly about the praise of self-esteem. Note the use of bibliometrics in selecting the sources. These are the authors and texts that people in seventeenth-century England actually bought. Each of the three authors was far more widely read than Thomas Hobbes, who is currently regarded as the key source on past thinking concerning the lust for power. Those pressed for time can find short sections of the old descriptions of humility in Point 8, "A Self-Test; Do You Qualify as a Privileged Western Male" on the opening page of my netsite, [traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com](http://traditionalsinsandvirtues.blogspot.com).

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Measured by the volume of publishing, the most influential theologian in 17th-century England was Richard Baxter (1615-1691). Baxter's books sold 301 known editions between 1650 and 1700, which translates to well over half-a-million copies. Baxter was also the spiritual leader of the Nonconformists and thus the fore-father of many modern American Protestants.

In the early 19th century a Scottish theologian, William Orme, became interested in Baxter and produced a collected edition of Baxter's writings on practical divinity. Thanks to the recent interest in digitizing old books, the whole 23 volume set is now available online. Those reading a paper version of this article, can find the set by searching "Baxter, practical works, hathitrust." Choose the 1830 edition of the set. Those reading an electronic version of this text can find the set at:<https://cat->

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alog.hathitrust.org/Record/008975216. Baxter's discussion of humility is on the first 60 pages of volume 3.

Orme's edition is especially useful, because he compiled an excellent index, which is in the end of volume 23. The index is so detailed it provides almost an encyclopedia of the conversion-centered, psychology-emphasizing English Protestantism—i.e., of the lost traditional Christianity. Nuanced meanings of the terms/concepts can be found by going to the volumes and pages cited in the index. The index is not listed in the table of contents. The easiest way to get to it is to click "Jump to the end" button and then start coming back up page by page.

My personal favorite is vol. 7 pp. 71 ff., where Baxter describes emotion by emotion how the *Touch of Grace* in the conversion process changed the convert's instinctive emotional reactions. The importance of this section is not limited to theology, because Baxter describes in minute detail a change that modern behavioral sciences do not believe to be possible.

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Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667) has impeccable credentials as a representative of the Anglican mainstream: bishop, doctor of divinity, chaplain to the King, and one of the most popular religious writers of the century. Taylor's *Holy Living* went through twenty known editions, which put the book close to the top of the bestseller lists. A digitized and modernized version of this book can be found by searching "Taylor Holy Living Anglican Library." The table of contents links directly to the section on humility.

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Richard Allestree (1619-1681) was another bestselling mainstream Anglican author. His *The Whole Duty of Man* went through fifty-six known editions between 1660 and 1700. The size of repeat editions was 3,000 to 3,500, so about 200,000 copies of this book were sold in late seventeenth-century England. *The Whole Duty* may have been used as a schoolbook because it was printed at a steady rate of about three editions every two years. Most popular texts had a burst of editions, and then the interest died down. Allestree's discussion of pride begins on page 121. Note the warnings about pride's destruction of self-criticism and the associated loss of the ability to improve by learning from errors.



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Also, please look at page 236, where Allestree explicitly and emphatically makes the point that in Christian morality people's deepest intentions and emotions are decisive. This idea was shared by all early Protestants, and it explains Protestantism's "the law demands the impossible" dogma because fallen humans cannot control their intentions and emotions by willpower. Allestree's observation also shows that the recent interest in "hate crimes" is a rediscovery of the wheel—and an intensely Christian wheel at that. In traditional Christian morality, uncontrolled hate is a deadly sin.

Allestree's writings can be found by searching "Allestree online books page". Numerous versions of *The Whole Duty of Man* are available online. The page numbers given above refer to John and Daniel Eyre's 1756 London edition, which is digitized in Google Books.