

SIN AND GUILT IN WORLD RELIGIONS

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The following paper is looking for some answers in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism; as well as in Judaism and Islam; and finally in Christianity to the following questions of ethics and morality:¹ How do we understand sin? What helps us to recognize our sins? What are the effects and consequences of sin? What kind of main sins are there? What do we do when we feel guilty and remorseful? How do we get rid of our sins and of our guilt? What is our aim and objective, when we try to avoid sin, and conduct a virtuous life? Sin and guilt are key concepts of course in legal ethics as well, constituting a connection between morality, religious studies and jurisprudence.

I. Sin and Guilt in Indian and Chinese Cultures

1. Taste Sugar, Become Sugar: Hinduism

Naturally, when one tries to emphasize some key concepts in a religion, one has to choose from the many thousand pages of holy literature as well as academic literature on the respective subject. Hinduism prefers to call itself *sanathana dharma* (eternal law), which originally is the universal and regulatory principle of truth, order and harmony of the Universe.² In this religious tradition a key concept is *karma*, which can be translated as action, work or deed. It is the universal, neutral and never-failing moral law of cause and effect, or of action and reaction, as well as of birth and death and rebirth. Because it binds together free will and destiny in a peculiar way, *karma* is a sum of all things that an individual has done in

¹ Comparative religion is helped and enhanced by interreligious dialogue: NAGYPÁL Szabolcs, 'Assisting Interreligious Dialogue by Intersubjective Mediation'. In ŠAJDA Peter (ed.), *Affectivity, Agency and Intersubjectivity*. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2012. pp. 217–233.

² A good collection of essays on Hinduism and morality – always in their connection with Christianity – is COWARD Harold (ed.), 'Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters'. Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1989.

the past, is currently doing in the present, and – moreover – will do in the future. Past, present and future do not only mean the current lifetime of an individual, but also one's previous and future life-forms as well.

The notion of *rebirth* (or, in other translations, reincarnation) entails the very concept of reciprocity, since one may well end up in someone else's shoes (or sandals) in one's next incarnation. Thus our good and bad deeds decisively define our next incarnation. Certainly, there is an eternal fight and war between good and evil. The bad accumulated results of *karma* may create a rather low quality of living, several hardships for us, penetrative destruction as well as massive disharmony. There is a well-known priestly prayer: '*O, God, forgive three sins that are due to my human limitations: You are everywhere, but I worship You here; You are without form, but I worship You in these forms; You need no praise, yet I offer You these prayers and salutations.*'³

Samsara is this cyclical world, which provides only ephemeral pleasures. The *aim of life* here is fourfold: first, *economic* prosperity, livelihood and wealth (*artha*); second, sensual and *aesthetic* pleasure (*kama*); and third, *ethical* righteousness (*dharma*). The various *methods* (*yoga*) to reach these goals are for example love and devotion (*bhakti yoga*), action (*karma yoga*), meditation (*raja yoga*) and wisdom (*jnana yoga*). *Ethics* in Indian religions are thus more relative, situational and contextual: personal intention and circumstances are also accounted for; social rank, kinship and stages of life are also taken into consideration, when deciding upon a certain behaviour or judging a given event.⁴

The personal *soul* (*atman*) is fundamentally the same as the universal soul (*Brahman*), so the other person's unfortunate situation becomes my own situation as well, which I am to understand through *empathy*. Even when greeting others in an encounter, one salutes the *spark* of the divine in the

³ A wide-spread liturgical invocation, often quoted in the literature on forgiveness, for example in the entry on *Religious Views on Forgiveness* in *Psychology Wiki* (<http://psychology.wikia.com>).

⁴ Different ethical structures encounter in a special way when they are called to form one distinct community: SAMARTHA Stanley Jedidiah, '*Partners in Community: Some Reflections on Hindu-Christian Relations Today*'. *Voices from the Third World* 1985/4. pp. 46–58.

other person. The unselfish, even *selfless* love and action for the genuine benefit of others – when one behaves without any thoughts for oneself – is the main rule.⁵ *Conscience* is the knowledge of good and evil, a distinction between eternal and non-eternal.⁶ *‘Forgiveness is a virtue of the weak, and an ornament of the strong. What can a wicked person do unto her or him, who carries the sabre of forgiveness in her or his hand? Fire falling on the grassless ground is extinguished of itself.’*⁷

The fourth, ultimate goal of life is *liberation*, release or freedom (*moksha*, *nirvana*, *samadhi*): it is reached, when the personal *atman* finds ultimate unity with the cosmic *Brahman*. Some Hindus also believe that after that event we spend eternity in *heaven*.⁸ As we can see the poetic difference between the first three ways and the fourth: some wish to taste sugar, others to become sugar.⁹

2. Unsatisfactoriness and Non-violence: Buddhism

When trying to trace the concepts of sin and guilt, we aim to summarize the most fundamental tenets in each religion: those which are held by most of its adherents. It does not mean, on the other hand, that different teachings would be less important or far-reaching. If one liked to begin a closer relationship with Buddhism, the very first step must be the acquaintance with the four *Noble Truths*. These were part of the establishing vision of Gautama himself: everything is *dukkha* (suffering); the origin of *dukkha* is craving for pleasures, craving to be, and craving not to be; the cessation of *dukkha* is the solution; and there is a path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. The fundamental question is: in what may I

⁵ The author of the following book calls our attention to many parallels between two great world religions: KALAPATI Joshua, *‘Dr. Radhakrishnan and Christianity: An Introduction to Hindu-Christian Apologetics’*. ISPCK, New Delhi, 2002.

⁶ Another good introduction to Hindu moral concepts: STIETENCROON Heinrich VON – KÜNG Hans, *‘Hinduismus: Christentum und Weltreligionen’*. Piper, München, 1984.

⁷ *Mahabharata* (transl. GANGULI Kisari Mohan). New Delhi, 1896. v. 33.

⁸ A good comparison between Hindu and Christian moral and ethical ideas I provided by a Sri Lankan Protestant thinker: ARIARAJAH S. Wesley, *‘Hindus and Christians’*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991.

⁹ The metaphor of the sugar comes from RAMAKRISHNA, recorded in the collection: GUPTA Mahendranath (ed.), *‘Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (The Nectar of Sri Ramakrishna’s Words)’*. Kolkata, 1902–1932.

place lasting relevance? To explain the word *dukkha*, we may also enlist *unsatisfactoriness*, dissatisfaction, anxiety or disquietude. This notion is aware of the fact that all forms of life are changing, impermanently, and without an inner core or substance; thus things never really measure up to our expectations and standards. The three *patterns* of *dukkha* are the following: the suffering of *suffering* itself – especially in the forms of birth, of old age, of sickness, of death, and of getting what we do not really want; the suffering of *change* – holding onto what is desirable, and not getting what we do want; and, finally, the *all-pervasive* suffering.

The *noble eightfold path*, mentioned as the last of the noble truths, embodies the right (proper and apt) view, the right intention, the right speech, the right action, the right work, the right effort, the right mindfulness, as well as the right concentration. The *middle way* always aids interpretation, after *taking refuge* in the triple gem: in *Buddha* (the enlightened one), in *dharma* (doctrine), and in *sangha* (community). In *Chan* and *Zen* Buddhism, which are specific Chinese and Japanese movements within this religion, practitioners should *destroy* everything, which block the way towards enlightenment – even Buddha and the patriarchs.

The famous five *precepts* (*Panca Sila*), where all five are equally important, summarize well the Buddhist ethics: no killing is allowed; stealing is forbidden, lying should not happen, sexual misconduct is to be avoided, and, finally, one must not use intoxicants. The basis of all these is the attitude of non-injury or *non-violence* (*ahimsa*) towards all living creatures, which can grow even into an intimate involvement with and relationship to the creation itself. The eight *Precepts* contain three additional and optional rules, kept only for one day a week: fasting in the afternoon, the avoidance of any entertainment, as well as the prohibition of luxury. As the highest ideal, in *Patimokkha* there are around two hundred twenty-seven rules for monks and nuns.

Buddhist *ethics* are deeply humanist and personalist; consequentialist; as well as virtue-oriented, character-based and community-focused. Ethics here mean a firm commitment to the path of liberation, providing harmony, coordination and happiness in the meantime. It entails both right *performance* and right *avoidance*. It is a great *gift* to the other people,

because it poses no real threat to others, and in this way creates an atmosphere and environment of trust, respect and security.

In this tradition, there is no genuine *sin* apart from *ignorance*, which is indeed the root of all evil. The problem of *evil* is in fact a very strong argument in Buddhism against a benevolent and omnipotent Creator.¹⁰ The three *poisons* or selfish emotions are greed (or in other words desire and lust); anger (or hate and wrath); as well as delusion (or pride and envy). When Buddhists speak about sin, they mean a transgression against the universal human moral code, a wrongdoing from the catalogued causes of suffering. There are certain negative consequences of breaking these precepts. *Sin* is basically whatever harms or obstructs the causes for happiness in this life, a better rebirth, the enlightenment, as well as the liberation from *samsara*. The five possible places of rebirth are the worlds of hell, of animals, of ghosts, of humans as well as of gods. The cultivation of giving and ethical conduct itself refines consciousness so that rebirth in a lower heaven becomes increasingly likely and probable. There is nothing improper or un-Buddhist about limiting our aims to a lower level of attainment, although it does not gain us *nirvana* at all, nor end our suffering hereby.

One can certainly reach enlightenment out of one's very *own effort*. Good *conscience* means a pure heart as well as a calm and well-directed mind; it makes us like a block of wood when attracted by vices. *Repentance* is a door to *dharma*, and it enables us to get reformed to a renewed and more proper path in life. *Forgiveness* effectively prevents harmful thoughts, for instance hatred or ill-will in us from causing destruction in our mental well-being. It opens a wide door for the cultivation of thoughts that leave a truly wholesome effect. In fact, the victimizer is considered to be the most unfortunate of all people. A *bodhisattva* is the person, who is mature and ready for *nirvana* after her or his enlightenment, but who postpones it and stays in the world, in order to be able to help other people to attain enlightenment as well.

Buddha's parable of the poisoned arrow speaks about the urgency and

¹⁰ An excellent example for interreligious dialogue is provided by the following bilateral book: BECHERT Heinz – KÜNG Hans, '*Buddhismus: Christentum und Weltreligionen*'. München, Piper, 1984.

importance of walking the ethical path.¹¹ In *Majjhima Nikaya* we read: ‘Suppose a person is struck by a poisoned arrow and the doctor wishes to take out the arrow immediately. Suppose the person does not want the arrow removed until she or he knows who shot it, her or his age, her or his parents, and why she or he shot it. What would happen? If one were to wait until all these questions have been answered, one might die first.’¹²

3. Rectification of Names: Confucianism

In Confucianism, there are rarely principles or laws to be found, which are indeed considered to be absolutely or universally true.¹³ Still we have to make an attempt to point out those notions, which are generally considered official. The relational or situational ethics of this religious tradition rather emphasize the maintenance of relationships: one has to do what one’s relationship really requires. The five *relationships*, which serve as measures are the connection to our father (and to our mother), to our elder brother (and to our elder sister), to our husband (and to our wife), to our ruler, as well as to our friend. It is in fact impossible to love the entire world equally and simultaneously, thus what we owe to another person is inversely proportional to her or his distance from us. However, an opposition to this notion can be found in the writings of Master Mo (-470–391), who strongly argued for universal love. In our life, we express our fidelity to those we owe our existence: to our parents and to our ancestors; as well as to those whom we owe our very survival: to our brothers (and to our sisters), to our neighbours, to our colleagues as well as to our close friends.

Human nature is naturally *good*, but it must be constantly influenced by fervent study and diligent practice, as well as it should be permanently nurtured through ritual and culture. The moral ideal in Confucianism is the *perfect person*, who combines the qualities of a saint, of a scholar

¹¹ *Cula-Malunkyovada Sutta: The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya* (transl. BHIKKHU Thanissaro).

¹² *Majjhima Nikaya* 63.

¹³ Chinese, especially Confucian and Taoist moral principles are further explained to Western readers in the excellent dialogical book: CHING Julia – KÜNG Hans, *Christentum und chinesische Religion*. München, Piper, 1988.

and of a lady or of a gentleman. The sinner, on the other hand, is a *small person*, who is petty in mind and heart, narrowly self-interested, greedy, superficial and materialistically minded, too.

The ethics of *reciprocity* and mutuality prevails in China, where we also find the universal Golden Rule: '*Do not do unto others, what you would not have them do unto you.*'¹⁴ The five *constant virtues* are *humaneness* or altruism; *justice*; *politeness* (or, in other words, etiquette, culture, propriety, as well as political correctness); *knowledge*; and finally *integrity*. But there we encounter four *accompanying virtues* as well: those are loyalty, entailing our obligations to the ruler; filial piety for the living, as well as that manifested through the veneration of ancestors; moderation (or, using other expressions, continence or temperance); and, finally, honesty or righteousness.

The *main sin* in this understanding is the failure to call things by their proper names, the confusion of terminology and the coining of new nomenclature, because these horrible acts result in us not being able to distinguish right from wrong in the world. The main virtue is thus the *rectification of names* and of terms. The acts and routines of everyday life are *rituals*, which slowly lead to a content, harmonious and healthy society.

4. Love, Simplicity and Humility: Taoism

In Taoism (or Daoism), there is an implicit human capacity for *goodness*, for harmony and for accord; in this Chinese religious tradition, one should follow *nature* in a simple (*pu*) and passive way, without any intentional, deliberate, conscious and purposeful action (*wu wei*).¹⁵ This conduct of life is like flowing in a river, virtually doing nothing against the Way (*Tao*).¹⁶ One should get rid of all the dangerous trappings of society and culture, which tragically mislead us.

The three *treasures* or jewels are *love* (or in other words charity,

¹⁴ Master KUNG, *Analects*. v. 11; XII, 2; XV, 23.

¹⁵ Pooh and *pu* provide a starting point for the author in understanding Taoism: HOFF Benjamin, '*The Tao of Pooh*'. Dutton, Penguin, 1982.

¹⁶ A second part in the Hoffian chain of thoughts was also published: HOFF Benjamin, '*The Te of Piglet*'. Dutton, Penguin, 1993.

compassion and kindness), *simplicity* (as well as frugality, moderation and temperance), together with *humility* (or modesty).¹⁷ Of course, Chinese words do have a lot of meaning, that is why different sources translate differently these expressions. The triplex of these treasures entail among others an abstention from any aggressive wars or capital punishment; an absolute simplicity of human living; as well as a harsh refusal to assert active authority above us.

Similarly to the other Asian religious traditions, Taoism also enlists five *precepts* of equal importance in its teaching: no murder is allowed, because even animals are containers of the uncreated energy; any stealing – or taking away what is not given – is forbidden; sexual misconduct should be avoided, especially between married women and men, and even among wife and husband it should not be too frequent; false speech and lying are grave misdeeds; intoxicants like alcohol or tobacco smoking are totally out of question. The point of these precepts is that they keep our body in purity; they are the roots of the upholding of the teaching; as well as they provide the way to achieving *Tao*, the ultimate reality. *Evil* is sometimes conceived in *aesthetic* terms: as a curved line or imbalance, in opposition to the required straight lines and balance in life and in the world.¹⁸

II. Sin and Guilt in Two Semitic Religions

1. Forgiveness is Natural: Judaism

Our summary of the ways how a certain religion grasps the notions of sin and guilt, and how it tackles them shows the given concept's direct or indirect relevance to jurisprudence. According to a Jewish explanation, God has withdrawn Godself in a self-emptying, *kenotic* way, so that creation could exist; thus, creation in a way lacks the full exposure to

¹⁷ These three treasures or jewels can be found in *Tao Te Ching* LXVII.

¹⁸ Recommended literature for this part is the body of all the entries in connection with Buddhism, Shintoism and Taoism (translated by NAGYPÁL Szabolcs) in the lexicon: *Britannica Hungarica*. Budapest, 1994–2001 (CD-ROM, 2005) (DVD-ROM, 2007).

God's all-good nature.¹⁹ *Evil* is the result of forsaking God: *Satan* may be just an idiom or parable of evil inclinations; or the being, who tests us for God.²⁰ *Halakha* is the proper way to live in this world; sin is straying from the path, a violation of the divine commandments. But there are violations of the Jewish law that are not necessarily a lapse in morality. There is an oft-quoted passage in *Isaiah*: '*I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and I create evil: I the Lord do all these things.*'²¹ It is probable that the author refers here primarily to natural evil, like calamity, bad times or disaster. Evil certainly causes *suffering*, but it may serve other purposes as well: first, it ultimately may *achieve* a greater *good*, that otherwise would not have been possible; second, it may be a *test*, and we are rewarded when passing it; or, it may be *beyond comprehension*, since God should not be held accountable to human conceptions on ethics and morality.

Humans are born with *free will* and morally neutral; we have a tendency towards goodness (that we can call good inclination), as well as a certain tendency towards evil (or, in other words, evil inclination) from our youth: '*The imagination of one's heart is evil from one's youth.*'²² In the creation story, humanity appears as not only good, but very good; some rabbis say that apart from the mentioned selfless orientation – which is indeed good – it is exactly the selfish orientation, which makes the world *very good*, because we bring to the world the fruits of human labour; thus – used rightly – both inclinations can serve God's will at the end of the day. Furthermore, now the possibility is really open to make a true choice to obey God's commandments: '*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, then when?*' – as HILLEL the Elder put it.²³ *Conscience* is thus a personal and direct revelation of the divine truth, a very important adjunct to the tradition.

¹⁹ Monotheistic Semitic religions constitute one religious family, even if it is many times overshadowed by their various conflicts: ARMSTRONG Karen, '*A History of God: The Four Thousand Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*'. New York, 1994.

²⁰ A good introduction to the world of Judaism from a Christian perspective: KÜNG Hans, '*Das Judentum: Wesen und Geschichte*'. München, 1991.

²¹ *The Book of Isaiah* 45,7.

²² *1Moses* 8,21.

²³ *Talmud, Pirkei Avot* 1,14.

Let us see now some examples for virtues: ‘*The world rests upon three things: justice, truth and peace (shalom)*’ – writes SIMEON ben Gamaliel.²⁴ ‘*The entire Torah is for the sake of the ways of shalom.*’²⁵ A very similar saying comes from SIMON the Just: ‘*The world rests upon three things: the Torah, service to God, and loving-kindness (compassion).*’²⁶ Human beings are images of God: ‘*God created human beings in God’s own image: in the image of God God created them.*’²⁷ The Golden Rule, as in all religions, is naturally present in Judaism also; both in the Torah: ‘*Never do to anyone else anything that you would not want someone to do to you*’;²⁸ as well as in the Talmud: ‘*What is hateful to you, do not do unto others.*’;²⁹ and: ‘*Whatever you hate to have done unto you, do not do to your neighbour.*’³⁰ Even the call for universal love is included in the Holy Scripture: ‘*Love your neighbour as yourself.*’³¹ As these quotations show as well, Biblical prohibitions may be transgressed for respect of others. The Seven *Laws of Noah* are binding to non-Jews, too; these rules are the following: the prohibition of idolatry, of murder, of sexual immorality, of blasphemy, of theft, of eating flesh of an animal that is still alive; as well as the positive rule of the establishment of courts of law in each countries.

The focus of Jewish moral behaviour is *orthopraxy*, the right conduct of life.³² Even though there are six hundred thirteen commandments for a religious person, but the ‘*righteous person lives by her or his rightfulness.*’³³ Sin has at least three levels: first, *deliberate* or intentional crime, rebellion, transgression, trespass – in short, a defiance of God; second, an iniquity or mischief committed knowingly, out of *uncontrollable emotion* or lust,

²⁴ *Talmud, Pirkei Avot* 1,18.

²⁵ *Talmud, Gittin* 59b.

²⁶ *Talmud, Pirkei Avot* 1,2.

²⁷ *1Moses* 1,27.

²⁸ *Tobias (Tobit)* 4,15.

²⁹ HILLEL the Elder, *Talmud, Shabbat* 31a

³⁰ AKIVA, *Talmud, Shabbat* 31a

³¹ *3Moses* 19,18.

³² Orthopraxy of course is rooted in and leads to spirituality: NAGYPÁL Szabolcs, ‘*Prayer is our Identity: Spiritual Values in Hasidic (Jewish) Wisdom*’. In BLOCKSOME Rebecca, ŠAJDA Peter, NAGYPÁL Szabolcs (eds.), ‘*Dreaming our Neighbour: The Shoa (Holocaust) and the Utopiae of Yesterday*’. Warszawa, World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) Central European Subregion (CESR), 2006. pp. 73–82.

³³ *Habakkuk* 2,4.

but not at all to defy God; and third, an accidental and *unintentional* fault or error.

God tempers justice with *mercy*; so there is always a way back, to win back God's favour.³⁴ God is merciful in manifold ways, and we are commanded to emulate God (in mediæval times it was called *imitatio Dei*).³⁵ God calls us for constant *repentance*: '*Return to me, and I shall return to you.*',³⁶ and '*Take words with you, and return to God.*'³⁷ In the Talmud prayer, '*repentance and works of charity are human's intercessors*'.³⁸ Offenses against *God* are primarily understood as violations of a contract or covenant, so they require confession, resolution and promise, as well as certain offerings. Additionally, offenses against other *people* also require restitution: one must go to those one harmed, and sincerely apologize three times; one cannot obtain forgiveness from God for wrongs one did to other people – thus, murder is deemed unforgivable. A beautiful *Yom Kippur* prayer connects the two types of offences: '*I fully and ultimately forgive everyone; so may You grant me grace in the eyes of others, that they too forgive me absolutely.*'³⁹ The 'reward' for forgiving others is not at all God's forgiveness, but the fact that it helps in obtaining forgiveness from others: indeed, only humans can forgive sins against humans. '*One should be easily pacified, and find it difficult to become angry: forgiveness is natural*' – MAIMONIDES (Mosheh BEN MAIMON, RAMBAM, 1135–1204) admonishes us.⁴⁰

For an unintentional sin, in the Temple of Jerusalem, according to the Torah, a *sin offering*, a *sacrifice* was required (or a scapegoat): the chosen animal had to be unblemished, slaughtered by a ritual butcher, the blood had to be sprayed out, and the inner parts properly burnt. At one point

³⁴ Morality appears oftentimes as a material for interreligious dialogue: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), '*Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue*'. Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1982.

³⁵ In these questions also there is a close connection between Judaism and Christianity: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION (F&O), '*The Church and the Jewish People*'. Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1967.

³⁶ *Malachi* 3,7.

³⁷ *Hosea* 14,3.

³⁸ *Shabbath* 32a.

³⁹ The prayer is recited in connection with the feast of Yom Kippur.

⁴⁰ *Mishneh Torah* 2,10.

the priests were even accused of rejoicing in the people's wickedness, as they were eating the offerings. After the fall of the Temple (in 70), following the prophesies of *Hosea* – '*I desire loving-kindness, and not sacrifice*'⁴¹ – the source of atonement became very different: '*The altar atoned for Israel, but now one's table atones (when the poor are invited)*' as YOCHANAN and ELEAZAR explains it in the Talmud.⁴²

2. Submission to the Infinite: Islam

The awareness of right and wrong is inherent in the soul: we are certainly able to discern God's will, and dwell, obey and remain in it by totally submitting ourselves to it; this means that we are morally *responsible* and accountable: '*The human soul is prone to evil, unless God bestows God's Mercy.*'⁴³ Our *natural inclinations* as human beings are basic survival and security, then material success, as well as the firm desire to be distinguished in our community: all these still belong to human ignorance.⁴⁴ Instead of these selfish desires, pure vanity and bad habits, believers should keep God in their hearts, and the material world in their hand.⁴⁵ *Conscience* is a dynamic personal connection to God, enhanced by practical and theoretical knowledge, by practice, by various deeds of piety, by repentance, by self-discipline as well as by prayers to God. Our conscience assists in piety, in right conduct, as well as in guarding ourselves against evil.⁴⁶

Evil can be understood and interpreted in at least three different ways in Islam: first, God is omnibenevolent, but humans try to act rather independently from God; second, God is omnipotent, and does whatever God wants; and finally, God has some wise purposes with evil. *Satan's*

⁴¹ *Hosea* 6,6.

⁴² *Berachot* 55a.

⁴³ *Koran* 12,53.

⁴⁴ Most of the Muslim stances become clearer when reading the following book: ESS JOSEF VAN – KÜNG Hans, '*Islam: Christentum und Weltreligionen*'. München, 1984.

⁴⁵ In the following book light is shed on various Muslim moral principles from the point of view of a female believer: HASHIMI Muhammad Ali AL-, '*The Ideal Muslimah: The True Islamic Personality of the Muslim Woman as Defined in the Koran and the Sunnah*' (transl. KHATTAB Nassruddin AL-). Riyadh, 1996.

⁴⁶ Ethical requirements towards an ideal Muslim in general are enlisted hereby: HASHIMI Muhammad Ali AL-, '*The Muslim Ideal: The True Islamic Personality as Defined in the Koran and the Sunnah*' (transl. KHATTAB Nassruddin AL-). Riyad, 1981.

(*Iblis* in Arabic) pattern of temptation is the same as it was in the times of the first human couple, Adam and Eve: the law of God is divinely established, but against it vain hopes are raised and suscited by the devil, which are founded upon the human beings' base desires. MUHAMMAD (570–632) challenged five main characteristics of pre-Islamic Arabia: first, prevailing polytheism; then, various ancestral traditions; third, division and disunity within the community; after that, manliness; and finally, desperate struggle for fame and for legacy. Instead, he called for monotheism, for absolute submission to God's power, for true and united community, for humility and genuine piety, as well as for an accountability to God. He fundamentally re-ordered these values, and placed them into the context of strict monotheism.⁴⁷

In the chapter *The Night Journey*, we find the Muslim *Ten Commandments*: the laws of monotheism, of honouring our parents, of temperance in expenditure, of caring for the orphans, of keeping our promises, of honesty; as well as the prohibitions of unjust killings, of adultery, of murder, and also of arrogant behaviour.⁴⁸ In another list, given in a famous hadith or prophetic saying, nine commandments are given: a consciousness of God, just speech, moderation, friendship, giving to those who refuse us, silence occupied with thought, admonition, and commanding what is right. Islam is an active submission to God by the *community* (*ummah*) in unison: thus, a morally healthy person should belong to a bigger unified community based upon Muslim piety, and through it should contribute to the moral health of the human society as a whole.

Sin is most of all an intentional act against the commands of God, Who is 'angered' by them; its *grades* are mistake, immorality, transgression, wickedness and depravity, as well as, finally, ascribing a partner to God (which we could call polytheism or idolatry). Sin in a way disintegrates conscience and covers it in blackness: thus, evil is not the cause of sin, but the result of it.⁴⁹ The deadly, pernicious and noxious *seven sins* in another

⁴⁷ A historical background for the development of moral concepts in Islam is provided here: WATT William Montgomery, '*A Short History of Islam*'. London, 1996.

⁴⁸ *Koran* 17.

⁴⁹ Morality sometimes helps, sometimes hinders interreligious advancement: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), '*Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations*'.

systematization are the following: associating anything with God; occult arts; killing without a just case; consuming the property of an orphan; usury; turning back from fight; and slandering chaste women.

To receive *forgiveness* from God, what are needed are recognition, admission, commitment and explicit asking: ‘*I ask forgiveness from God*’ – as the daily prayer contains it. Or, in the version of the *Koran*: ‘*Forgive our sins, remove from us our iniquities, and take to Yourself our souls in the company of the righteous.*’⁵⁰ A part of *repentance* or returning is *atonement*, which ranges from prayer to good deeds as well as to full compensation. *No sacrifice* can add to divine grace, nor replace the necessity of repentance: it is at the end of the day our piety that reaches God. Major sins are of course also legally punishable, but most of them are left to God to punish. Idolatry is so grave a sin, that it may even block the healing power of forgiveness: ‘*God does not forgive idol worship (if maintained until death).*’⁵¹ According to some, the Fire or *Hell* may be just a transformed form of human sin. In the phrasing of a hadith: ‘*No one’s good deeds will put her or him in Paradise, unless God bestows God’s pardon and mercy on her or him.*’⁵² God is *merciful* and oft-forgiving, and certainly allows us to go to the Garden or *Heaven*, if we indeed have at least an atom’s worth of *faith* within us.

III. Sin and Guilt in Christianity

1. Understanding Sin and Evil

Ethics as a discipline in general deals with the right human conduct and the good life – that is, the life simply satisfying, really worth living, so, how a human being ought to live.⁵³ *Theodicy* (*theodicea*) is a connected

Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1992.

⁵⁰ *Koran* 3,193.

⁵¹ *Koran* 4,116.

⁵² Hadith of Abu HURAYRAH and AISHA.

⁵³ Ethics as a field is a hot topic in the Christian interdenominational, ecumenical movement as well: BEST Thomas F. – ROBRA Martin (eds.), ‘*Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*’. Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1997.

discipline; in fact, it is a peculiar defence or apologetics, dealing with the problem of evil. *Hamartiology*, finally, is the theology of sin.⁵⁴

According to AUGUSTINE of Hippo (354–430), evil is a consequence of the fall of humans, a privation of good or a deviation from it. In other words, evil is an unsuitable and unjustifiable reality, being in opposition to God, which in fact ought not to exist in the world.

While good in the *scholastic* understanding has a due proportion of form, order and measure, *evil*, on the other hand, is a privation or absence of due form, order, or measure: it is thus deemed as a deficiency in perfection.⁵⁵ Consequently, *sin* (in Greek: *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία), which literally means ‘missing the target’) is moral evil, so a non-agreement, a discord or even a privation of conformity to right reason and to the eternal laws of God: ‘Sin is lawlessness.’⁵⁶ Sin – out of a determined will for controlling one’s destiny – is a longing for and a desire for a passing, unreal as well as false good, out of our sheer ignorance: in Thomist terms, it can be expressed as the turning away from God, Who is the immutable good; and at the same time it is an inordinate turning to inferior, mutable goods, the creatures of the same God.

The cause of sin as a spiritual stain and uncleanness is the abuse of free will, when a person deliberately refuses to obey God, and wants to be ‘like God’.⁵⁷ In this personal understanding, sin is an *estrangement* from God, resulting from not doing God’s revealed will: since it seriously damages our image and likeness of God, it serves as a real block and a heavy barrier to enjoy a complete relationship with God: ‘*Everything, which does not come from faith, is sin.*’⁵⁸

IRENÆUS of Lyon (135–202) developed a more positive understanding of the problem; in his thinking, evil may even be a kind of means to good,

⁵⁴ All these subjects are parts of moral theology as a distinct academic field: BÖCKLE Franz, ‘*Fundamentalmoral*’. München, 1977.

⁵⁵ The future pope looks at the structure of moral theology in Christianity: RATZINGER Joseph Aloisius, ‘*Principles of Christian Morality*’. San Francisco, 1986.

⁵⁶ *1John* 3,4.

⁵⁷ *Genesis* 3,5.

⁵⁸ *Romans* 14,23.

because one cannot achieve moral goodness or love for God, if there is no suffering in the created world. *Temptation* as a near occasion of sin fits to this picture very well. God created an epistemic distance – by which God is not immediately knowable to us –, so we could strive to encounter and to know God. Our closer knowledge of pain prompts and urges us to help others in pain and suffering; it also builds our character; and spurs our human creativity and production: ‘*We would never learn the art of goodness in a world designed as a hedonistic paradise*’ – opines Richard SWINBURNE.⁵⁹

2. Original Sin and Actual Sin

The sin at the origin, in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, has passed on a negative spiritual heritage to the whole of humanity, so we inherit a rather damaged and corrupted human nature. An interpretation of this teaching is the notion of hereditary guilt and inherent sinfulness by AUGUSTINE: according to this view, God holds all people accountable for rebellion and for revolt, so we indeed deserve wrath and condemnation; a radicalisation of this line of thought is the doctrine of *total depravity* developed later on by Jean CALVIN (1509–1564). Another understanding of the concept is by PELAGIUS (354–418): to him, a human is a moral *tabula rasa*, without a special need for divine grace to avoid sinfulness; so the Fall is just a negative moral precedent for us. Orthodoxy, but also Semi-Pelagianism speaks about ancestral sin: we are naturally impacted by this, having inborn tendencies to rebel against God. Roman Catholicism emphasizes that original sin has effectively obscured the original goodness of humanity, but it has not entirely extinguished our *potential* for goodness. And almost everyone agrees that through *baptism* human nature is healed, and sanctifying grace is restored, when we are (re-)born of water and Spirit.

Each human being is only personally guilty of her or his own *actual sin*, which is a willful and intentional act in contrary to the will of God, by thought and desire, by word, by doing evil through action and commission,

⁵⁹ The famous statement is included in the following book: SWINBURNE Richard, ‘*Providence and the Problem of Evil*’. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998.

or by refraining from good through omission: ‘Sin is a word, deed or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God’ – says AUGUSTINE.⁶⁰

3. Different Kinds of Sin

Mortal (grave, grievous or serious) *sin* constitutes a major human disobedience, which is mortally harmful and ultimately deadly to the person’s own soul. It consists of a serious or grave matter – of the weight of the Ten Commandments –, and a full knowledge based on sufficient reflection, as well as the full, deliberate and complete consent of the human will. In those Christian denominations, which function following this theological and spiritual logic, mortal sin takes away sanctifying grace, constituting a rupture in our link to saving grace, and thus nullifies the merit earned from good deeds, making the soul an enemy of God, deserving hell.

Eternal sin is an unforgivable or unpardonable sin, which constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: examples may be grave despair, presumption, resistance, envy, impenitence or obstinacy. There are certain sins that *cry to heaven*: like the blood of Abel, the sin of the Sodomites, the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, the cry of the foreigners, the widows and the orphans, as well as the injustice committed to the wage earner. Apostasy, desecration or abortion, for instance, in some traditions lead to automatic *excommunication*.⁶¹

Venial (forgivable or pardonable) *sin* makes our will even weaker to resist; it is not so serious or grave, or at least the sinner believes without full knowledge that it is just slightly wrong, or she or he does not fully, deliberately and completely consent. The soul in such cases rightly deserves the partial loss of grace, the wound in the relationship, and God’s punishment in this life (or in the purgatory, in Roman Catholic

⁶⁰ The source of the quotation: AUGUSTINUS, ‘*Contra Faustum Manichæum*’. 22,27. In *Patrologia Latina* (PL). 42,418.

⁶¹ The Church is a moral community, thus grave immorality may lead to excommunication: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), ‘*Costly Unity: The Church as Moral Community*’. Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1993.

understanding).⁶² Divine *punishment* has a dual nature: it is eternal in the form of penance, as well as it is temporal in connection with purgatory and the indulgences.⁶³

The seven *deadly sins*, capital vices or cardinal sins (abbreviated in Latin as SALIGIA) were much talked about in the Middle Ages; they were developed by Pope GREGORY I (590–604) in 590, based on the lists of EVAGRIUS Ponticus (345–399) and John CASSIAN (360–435). According to this classification, pride (*superbia*) is sharp in opposition with the prime virtue of humility (*humilitas*), greed (*avaritia*) with charity (*caritas*), lust (*luxuria*) with chastity (*castitas*), envy (*invidia*) with kindness (*humanitas*), gluttony (*gula*) with temperance (*temperantia*), wrath (*ira*) with patience (*patientia*), and finally sloth (*acedia* or *socordia*) with diligence (*industria*).

4. Conscience and Free Will

Freedom for the good is at the same time necessarily a freedom for evil, too; and also vice versa, to be able to sin is a sign of human freedom: ‘*That we turn away from God is our doing, and this is the bad will; but to turn back to God we are unable, unless God arouses and helps us, and this is the good will*’ – AUGUSTINE teaches.⁶⁴

Throughout the history of ideas, *conscience* has been depicted primarily as a battleground, as the subjective norm of morality, or as the last practical judgment of reason, using moral syllogism, as an internal awareness of a moral standard in the mind concerning the quality of one’s motives, as a consciousness of our own actions, as an approving inner light or as a condemning inner darkness. We are anyway responsible for correcting our conscience by constantly training, enhancing and refining it, as well as by

⁶² Naturally such ethical topics have ecumenical consequences as well: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), ‘*Costly Obedience: The Meaning of Moral Formation in Church and World*’. Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1996.

⁶³ Ecclesiology constitutes a framework for moral issues in Christianity: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), ‘*Costly Commitment: The Relation of Ecclesiology and Ethics*’. Genève, World Council of Churches (WCC) Publications, 1994.

⁶⁴ Quoted for example in the *Contrition* entry of the *Catholic Encyclopædia*. New York, 1907–1912.

diligently seeking moral truth from authentic sources:⁶⁵ *‘Preserve a quiet conscience and you will always have joy. A quiet conscience can endure much, and remains joyful in all trouble; but an evil conscience is always fearful and uneasy’* – writes Thomas KEMPIS (1380–1471).⁶⁶

In order to become contemplative one first must cleanse and purify her or his conscience; and *synderesis* is a spark of intuitive insight or revelation arriving there. Or, in Thomism, it is the structured development of our innate remnant awareness of the absolute good.⁶⁷

5. Repentance and Contrition

Sin is both individual and social; so it may happen against God, against our neighbours, or against oneself; so reconciliation is expected to be with God, with our fellow human beings, and with the Church:⁶⁸ *‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.’*⁶⁹ Penitence as a sacrament is divided into three different acts: contrition or sorrow, confession or disclosure, as well as satisfaction or penance, when one makes amends. The very same good news, which calls us for repentance, at the same time produces it.⁷⁰

Contrition is a special Christian concept, which originally means *‘being crushed to pieces’*, and in a metaphoric way it is an affliction of our spirit, a repentance of our heart, and a grief of our soul: *‘Many sins are forgiven her, because she has loved much.’*⁷¹ As a complete and sincere remorse, regret as well as a sense of guilt consists of a recognition of the wrong

⁶⁵ Special moral theology embraces moral situations one by one, using and applying the general principles of course: WEBER Helmut, *‘Spezielle Moraltheologie’*. Graz – Wien – Köln, 1999.

⁶⁶ KEMPIS Thomas, *Imitatio Christi*. XXXI.

⁶⁷ General moral theology tackles the questions of definition and core concepts: SPAEMANN Robert, *‘Moralische Grundbegriffe’*. München, 1982.

⁶⁸ These concentric spheres are dealt with in the article: NAGYPÁL Szabolcs, *‘Humanity, Solidarity, Morality and Partnership: Gender Issues in the Concentric Tradition of the Ecumenical Movement’*. In NAGYPÁL Szabolcs (ed.), *‘Genre: Unité et Autorisation – Género: Unidad y Autorización – Gender: Unity and Empowerment’*. Porto Alegre, World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), 2005. 108–115.

⁶⁹ *Matthew* 5,7.

⁷⁰ General moral theology is understood as an answer to a calling: WEBER Helmut, *‘Allgemeine Moraltheologie: Ruf und Antwort’*. Graz – Wien – Köln, 1991.

⁷¹ *Luke* 7,47.

done and a sorrow of the soul; a detestation of the evil; and a firm desire to turn to good and a resolution not to sin again. The prayer of the Prodigal Son is a very appropriate one here: ‘*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You: I am not worthy to be called Your son.*’⁷² It has two types: in *imperfect* contrition one repents out of fear of loss of heaven or fear of hell, or of the disgust from sin; but in *perfect* contrition one repents purely for the love of God. Contrition has four *qualities*: it is sincere and interior, supernatural by grace, universal against all sins, as well as sovereign, because it regards sin as the greatest possible evil. Alphonsus DE LIGUORI (1696–1787) emphasizes the importance of contrition in the following way: ‘*The duty of making an act of contrition is urgent, when one is obliged to make an act of love.*’⁷³

Repentance (in Greek, *metanoia*) involves a change of thought, of mind, of one’s views, of heart, of purpose and of consciousness; it is a genuine transformation, resulting in a radically different thinking afterwards.⁷⁴ ISAAC of Syria (or of Nineveh, †700) emphasizes its importance in the following way: ‘*This life has been given to you for repentance: do not waste it on vain pursuits.*’⁷⁵

When in jurisprudence, legal theory and legal ethics we work with the notions of sin and guilt, we have to keep in mind that in the continental legal system the topic has a (Judeo-)Christian theoretical background, but one which does not fully determines its course. In the first paragraph we

⁷² Luke 15,21.

⁷³ Quoted for example in the *Contrition* entry of the *Catholic Encyclopædia*. New York, 1907–1912.

⁷⁴ The following entries in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) serve as points of orientation in the topic of morality in world religions: *Actual Sin, Buddhist Ethics, Buddhist Views of Sin, (Roman) Catholic Guilt, Christian Views on Sin, Christianity and Judaism, Confucianism, Confucius, Conscience, Contrition, Dukkha or Suffering in Buddhism, Eternal Sin, Ethics in Religion, Eutyphro Dilemma, Evil, Five Precepts in Buddhism, Five Precepts in Taoism, Forgiveness, Hamartiology, Hinduism, Internal Sin, Islamic Ethics, Islamic Views on Sin, Jewish Ethics, Jewish Views on Sin, Morality and Religion, Mortal Sin, Original Sin, Problem of Evil, Repentance, Seven Deadly Sins, Sila in Buddhism, Sin Offering in Judaism, Sin, Ten Days of Repentance in Judaism, Three Treasures in Taoism, Venial Sin.*

⁷⁵ The source of the quotation: ISAAC of Syria, ‘*Ascetical Homilies*’. Brookline, 2012.

said that there are at least seven fundamental questions to be asked from each religion, in connection with sin and guilt. We found that in most of the cases there are of course no unified answers to these for the whole of humanity.

Some religions use the word 'sin', others do not. But even those who prefer using another word, there is something to denote what is morally and ethically wrong. There are actions and thoughts to avoid in human life, and there are means and instruments in religions, which help us to recognize those deeds and directions; as well as to get rid of our guilt, when we feel hopelessly remorseful. The effects of sin spread in the world around us, and its consequences might mean worsened and more corrupted relationships with ourselves, with our fellow human beings, as well as with the transcendent world. When we try to avoid sin, our aim and objective is to conduct a virtuous life, in order to live it fully and wholly, according to its right order.

As a comparative overview, this paper made an attempt to sketch the related concepts in other world religions as well, which traditions of course make a crucial contribution to the civilizations and legal systems and legal ways of thinking where they serve as the main influences. We must better understand those with whom we share this globe, also as far as their ethical and legal ways of thinking are concerned. For the continental legal system in Europe, this endeavour entails not only a broadening of our horizons, with certain crucial lessons to learn, but also new challenges to academic research as well, so far not properly or satisfactorily addressed. This effort becomes inevitable in a pluralist and globalised world, and in a Europe where other faith traditions will certainly play a growing role in the upcoming decades.

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SUMMARY

Sin and Guilt in the World Religions

SZABOLCS NAGYPÁL

Sin and guilt are key terms of jurisprudence, theory of law and lawyers' ethics alike and provide a connection between the major fields of general ethics, the science of religions and social sciences. The study comprises three parts, in accordance with the division of religions. According to Part I, the moral teaching of Hinduism has two branches depending on whether the person in question wishes to have a relationship with or wants to be part of the other world. The fundamental experience of Buddhism is that the world cannot provide satisfaction, as everything is in the status of dislocation: things should be put into order by non-violence and non-harming. Whereas Confucianism emphasizes order to be reached by the rectification of names, Taoism regards love, simplicity and humility as most important. Part II deals with Judaism and the Islam from the Abrahamic religious cultures. Whereas the former underlines the natural nature of forgiveness, the latter emphasizes the infinite submission to God and the observation of laws. Part III of the study discusses Christianity, first by searching for the definition of sin and evil, then explaining original sin and deducing personal sin from it. This is followed by the discussion of the individual types of sin and finally of the basic ethical terms of conscience, free will, penitence and repentance. The author asks the same

questions from all religious traditions determining the large civilizations of the Earth: What is sin? How can we identify it? What are the impacts and consequences of sin? How many kinds of sins are there? What is shame and guilt? How can we be free of them? What is our purpose with avoiding sin and living a virtuous life? Each of the major systems of law is embedded in a given civilization, and each of these civilizations is basically determined by a world religion. Being familiar with the ethical system of religions is indispensable for jurisprudence as well on our diverse and global Earth, with special regard to Europe.

RESÜMEE

Sünde und Schuldbewusstsein in den Weltreligionen

SZABOLCS NAGYPÁL

Sünde und Schuldbewusstsein sind Schlüsselbegriffe der Rechtswissenschaft, der Rechtstheorie und der juristischen Sittenlehre, die eine Verbindung zu den weiten Bereichen der allgemeinen Sittenlehre, der Religionswissenschaft und der Sozialwissenschaften darstellen. Die Studie besteht aus drei Teilen und folgt der Aufteilung der Religionsfamilien.

Dem ersten Teil zufolge teilt sich die Sittenlehre des Hinduismus in zwei Teile, je nachdem, ob jemand eine Beziehung mit dem Jenseits eingehen bzw. Teil dieses sein möchte. Die Grunderfahrung des Buddhismus ist, dass die Welt keine Zufriedenheit bietet, dass alles aus den Fugen geraten ist. Dabei führt der Weg des Schaffens von Ordnung über den Verzicht auf Gewalt und das Nicht-Schaden. Der Konfuzianismus stellt durch die Wiederherstellung der Namen die Ordnung in den Mittelpunkt, der Taoismus die Liebe, Einfachheit und Demut. Von den religiösen Kulturen, die auf Abraham zurückgeführt werden können, sind im zweiten Teil das Judentum und der Islam enthalten. Während Ersteres auf die Natürlichkeit der Vergebung hinweist, betont Letzterer die Unterwerfung gegenüber dem unendlichen Gott und das Befolgen der Gesetze.

Der dritte Teil der Studie schließlich behandelt das Christentum. Dabei sucht sie zuerst nach der Definition von Sünde und des Bösen, führt dann die Erbsünde und – daraus abgeleitet – die persönliche Sünde aus. Danach konzentriert sich der Text auf bestimmte Arten von Sünden, um schließlich auf das Gewissen und den freien Willen sowie die moralischen Grundbegriffe der Buße und Reue zu sprechen zu kommen. An jede der religiösen Traditionen, die die großen Zivilisationen der Erde bestimmen, wendet sich die Studie mit derselben Frage: Was ist Sünde? Wie erkennen wir sie? Welche Folgen und Konsequenzen hat sie? Wie viele Arten gibt es? Was macht Scham und Schuldbewusstsein aus? Wie können wir all dem entkommen? Welches Ziel verfolgen wir mit der Vermeidung der Sünde und mit dem tugendhaften Leben? Die großen Rechtssysteme fügen sich alle in jeweils eine Zivilisation ein, die ihrerseits grundsätzlich von jeweils einer Weltreligion bestimmt werden. Auf unserer vielseitigen Erde und insbesondere in Europa ist die Kenntnis der Sittenlehre der Religionen auch für die Rechtswissenschaft unabdingbar.