

Scholastic Theology, Augustinian Realism and Original Guilt

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SUMMARY

Original guilt is one of the most problematic aspects of the doctrine of original sin. There have been a number of attempts in the tradition to make sense of original guilt. In this article, I consider the arguments of medi-

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Problem der Urschuld ist einer der schwierigsten Aspekte der Lehre von der Ursünde. Traditionell gibt es eine Reihe von Versuchen, der Lehre von der Urschuld Sinn zu geben. In diesem Artikel werden Argumente von mittelalterlichen und protestantischen scholastischen Theologen sowie von Louis Berkhof, einem Erben der

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RÉSUMÉ

La question de la culpabilité originelle est l'un des aspects les plus problématiques de la doctrine du péché originel. On rencontre dans la tradition une diversité d'approches pour aborder cette question. Dans le présent article, je considère les arguments des théologiens de la scolastique médiévale, puis protestante, pour ter-

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The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

(*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, answer to Question 18.)

There have been several recent discussions of the nature of original sin from amongst systematic and philosophical theologians. One of the most significant of these has been the work of Rich-

ard Swinburne. In his discussion of original sin in *Responsibility and Atonement*, he distances himself from the Augustinian tradition by (amongst other things) rejecting the notion of original guilt. His reason for so doing is that:

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eval and Protestant scholastic theology, and one twentieth century heir to the scholastic project, Louis Berkhof. In each case, their arguments for original guilt all fail to satisfy. However, I argue that a version of Augustinian realism, augmented by some contemporary metaphysics, may be able to make sense of original guilt.

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Scholastik aus dem 20. Jahrhundert, bedacht. Es wird gezeigt, dass die Argumente in keinem der Fälle überzeugen. Es wird dann argumentiert, dass eine bestimmte Version augustiniischen Realismus, angereichert durch ein wenig gegenwärtige Metaphysik, es ermöglicht, das Thema Urschuld in einen sinnvollen Zusammenhang zu stellen.

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ard Swinburne. In his discussion of original sin in *Responsibility and Atonement*, he distances himself from the Augustinian tradition by (amongst other things) rejecting the notion of original guilt. His reason for so doing is that:

no-one can be guilty in the literal sense for the sins of another, unless he had some obligation to deter that person and did not do so. Since none of us today could have had the obligation to deter the first sinner from sinning, we cannot be guilty for his sins.¹

Is Swinburne right about this? It does seem,

prima facie, that I cannot be guilty of the sin of a long dead ancestor. But, contrary to Swinburne, it does not appear to be the case that I can, in principle, be guilty for the sin of another individual. Why can I not be guilty for the sin of another? One reason is that guilt is in principle non-transferable. That is, there is an aspect to the notion of guilt that does not admit of transference from one individual to another. If someone is guilty of a sin their punishment might, in certain circumstances, be transferable to another, such as a friend paying my parking fine. But guilt cannot be transferred. It remains the guilt of the particular individual that committed the crime, even when someone other than the perpetrator of that crime pays for the punishment for the crime. This means that even if a friend pays my parking fine, I remain the guilty party. It might be thought that a person could be liable for the sin of another, and thereby guilty of another person's sin. For instance, if I witness the brutal stabbing of someone outside a nightclub and do nothing to prevent it from occurring (where I could have done something to prevent it), I might be liable for not intervening and helping the poor victim. But I am not thereby guilty of stabbing the person concerned. So, guilt must also be distinguished from liability. Even if there are cases where a person may be liable for the sins of another, it does not follow that they are thereby guilty of the other person's sin.² In this regard, Swinburne claims that, 'we do have some guilt for the wrongdoings and so the sins of those close to us, whom by teaching and example we could have deterred.'³ But this does not sufficiently distinguish between liability for the sin of another, and guilt for that sin. I might be guilty of not deterring them from sinning. In that sense, my liability for not intervening and preventing them from sinning, where I could have done so, gives rise to guilt. But it is not the guilt of that other person; it is my own guilt for not helping that other person, or not preventing them from sinning. And this is clearly not the same thing at all.

This has important implications for the notion of original guilt.⁴ A coherent account of original guilt will have to be fine-grained enough to distinguish between punishment deserved and guilt for that punishment, as well as the difference between liability for a particular sin and guilt for that sin. Such an account will also have to show, in some strong sense, that the guilt of Adam is also the guilt of his posterity. Furthermore, a coherent account of original guilt will have to provide

an argument to demonstrate that the imputation of original guilt from Adam to his posterity is not unfair or immoral. It is not sufficient for the theologian to show that Adam's posterity is punishable for Adam's sin. Punishment does not entail guilt, as we have just noted. Nor is it sufficient for the theologian to show that Adam's posterity is (somehow) liable for Adam's sin. Liability does not entail guilt. (And, in any case, it does not seem likely that I can be liable for not preventing the sin of Adam.) Even if the theologian were to demonstrate that Adam's posterity sinned in the same way as Adam, imitating him in his sin, this would not be sufficient to establish that God is just in attributing the guilt of Adam to his posterity, as the traditional doctrine of original guilt claims. It would only show that Adam's posterity would all (inevitably?) imitate Adam in sinning, for which they will be guilty, like Adam was guilty of his original sin.⁵ What the defender of a traditional doctrine of original guilt has to show is that Adam's guilt is the guilt of his posterity. But since guilt is *in principle* non-transferable, this seems, to say the least, like a considerable task. Nevertheless, it is a task that has been attempted in a number of different ways in the tradition and is an important problem in theological anthropology. If a coherent account of original guilt is not forthcoming, then this aspect of the traditional, full-orbed doctrine of original sin must be rejected. It therefore behoves us to deal with this issue carefully.⁶

In what follows we shall canvas three ways in which scholastic theology made sense of original guilt.⁷ These comprise the medieval consensus, the Reformed Orthodox consensus, and the synthesis of these two views in the work of one particular mid-twentieth century heir to scholastic theology, Louis Berkhof. We shall see that these three views are all unable to account for the problem of the transference of guilt. They also fail to sufficiently differentiate between punishment, liability and guilt. This skews the discussion in important respects. Having evaluated these three different positions on original guilt, we shall put forward an alternative position, using the language of the scholastic debate, but moving beyond the scholastics in order to overcome the problem of transference that the notion of original guilt poses for a full-orbed doctrine of original sin. This alternative is a version of Augustinian realism that builds on the work of the nineteenth century American divine, William Shedd.

The Reformed Orthodox⁸ on original sin

Unlike the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures, there is no agreed definition of original sin amongst theologians. Hence, any discussion of original sin is bound to be partisan in some respect. In this essay we shall assume the position of the majority view amongst the Reformed Orthodox. These theologians claim that original sin comprises both a *macula* (vitiating nature) and *reatus* (liability (to sin)). Typically, this is understood in terms of original corruption and original guilt. Original corruption is that vitiating nature which is passed on to Adam's posterity as a consequence of Adam's sin. Original guilt is the transference of Adam's guilt to his posterity.⁹ In the medieval tradition these notions were understood in terms of *inherited* sin and guilt. But the Protestant Orthodox rejected this for *imputed* sin and guilt. This, apparently minor distinction, involves an important theological development. If original sin is inherited, then it is passed down the generations by natural descent. Adam's sin is passed to his children, and from them, to their children, and so on. But if original sin is imputed by divine fiat to Adam's posterity, then it is attributed to each member of Adam's posterity directly by God. That is, God directly applies the sin of Adam to each of his descendants. It is this latter view that the Reformed Orthodox took up in their expositions of original sin. In this regard, Otto Weber notes that,

[a]s a matter of fact, Orthodoxy went to complicated lengths in order to retain the "guilt" character of original sin.... Through the process of transferral it was possible to make the facticity of sin understandable, but not the guilt. On the contrary, if the original sin of the individual was based upon "propagation," then it was fate but not "guilt" in the sense of being caused in a responsible way, contrary to the norms. Therefore Orthodoxy opted to base the guilt-character of original sin upon an act of divine "imputation".

This theological development means that:

The unity of mankind in sin, the unity of every man with the sinner Adam, does not appear here to be ontic, based upon heredity, but rather theological. God has selected man to be his counterpart and takes all men as the one man, every man as the sinner who is Adam.¹⁰

There was some debate amongst the Reformed

Orthodox about whether the sinful nature passed on to Adam's posterity was transmitted immediately or mediately. If it was mediate, then the sinful nature (that is, the original corruption or *macula*) was transmitted through natural generation. Original guilt may be said to arise out of this, or be dependent upon the *macula* that is transmitted to Adam's posterity through natural generation. The majority of the Reformed theological community defended the view that original sin is transmitted to each member of Adam's posterity immediately, by divine fiat. This means that guilt (logically) precedes the attribution of corruption. Humanity post-fall are corrupt because they are guilty, on this view. They are not, as the mediate imputation view states, guilty because they are corrupt.

This mediate view was a minority report amongst the Reformed theologians of the Post-Reformation era. It centred upon the school of theology at Saumur in France, under the influence of Moses Amyraut and Joshua Placaeus. It was Placaeus who was alleged to have held to mediate imputation. The argument works in the following way. Corruption is passed down the generations from Adam to his posterity. God does not impute this corrupt moral nature to each human individually (and therefore, immediately). Instead, he imputes it mediately, through the generations, to Adam's posterity. As Philip Quinn makes clear:

According to the theory of immediate imputation the guilt of Adam's first sin is directly imputed to his posterity and so in them guilt logically precedes and is the ground of inherent sin or corruption. Adam's descendants are corrupt because they are guilty. According to the theory of mediate imputation, which originated with Josua Placaeus, the order is reversed; corruption in Adam's descendants logically precedes and is the ground of imputed sin or guilt. They are guilty because they are corrupt.¹¹

This view never gained widespread support and was abandoned (in fact, condemned as unorthodox by the majority of the Reformed¹²).

In what follows we shall assume the immediate imputation view, since it is the majority view amongst the Reformed Orthodox, and refer to original, as opposed to inherited, sin and guilt, once again, in order to restrict discussion to the majority opinion amongst the Reformed Orthodox.

Three scholastic positions on the nature of original guilt

To begin with, we shall assess the difference between three scholastic views of original guilt: the Medieval and Reformed Orthodox, and the fusion of elements of both of these traditions in the view of one representative twentieth century Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof.

The medieval scholastic position on original (inherited) guilt can be distinguished in the following way.¹³ According to the medieval schoolmen, there are two parts to inherited guilt. These are, first, *reatus culpae*, or the liability to guilt, which denotes that by which a person is unworthy of divine grace, and counted worthy of divine wrath and punishment. Secondly, there is *reatus poenae*, the liability to punishment. This denotes that aspect of guilt by which a person is subject to condemnation. The medieval schoolmen argued God might remit that *reatus culpae* through the work of Christ (the so-called obedience of Christ, or *obedientia Christi*). However, the *reatus poenae* is not remitted by the work of Christ, but may be satisfied by, for example, a moral life or a punishment served, e.g. time spent in purgatory, or, perhaps, a life of great sanctity.

An example may help to make this distinction clearer. Let us say a man commits murder, but later repents and becomes a Christian. God forgives the man his sin through the work of Christ, such that the man's *reatus culpae* (liability to culpability) for that sin is dealt with. But he still has to serve a custodial sentence for his crime, thereby paying the penalty due his sin (*reatus poenae*). In this instance, the man has his sin forgiven him and the liability to guilt that goes with this removed, or remitted. But he still has the liability to punishment that must be served in gaol.

A similar thought experiment might be used to show that a person could have liability to guilt removed in the case of sin against God, (blasphemy, say). But such a person would still have the liability to punishment that is not remitted by Christ's work, and might, on the understanding of the medieval schoolmen, lead that person to be punished for their sin in purgatory. Nevertheless, in this situation the person concerned will not be finally condemned for their sin, since the liability to guilt has been remitted through the work of Christ. But they may still have a sentence to serve prior to entry into heaven. A biblical example of this might be the story of King David and the

death of his firstborn with Bathsheba, a punishment for the sin of adultery (2 Samuel 12). We might say that God removed David's guilt, but the punishment for his sin was still served upon him. The guilt for his sin was removed; but the penal consequence of that sin was still enforced, and his child died as a result.

Like the Medieval schoolmen, the Reformed Orthodox maintained that there are two aspects to original (that is, immediately imputed, as opposed to inherited) guilt. But the distinction used by the Reformed Orthodox was different from the distinction used by the medievals. The first aspect of the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of original guilt is the *reatus potentialis*, or potential guilt. This refers to the intrinsic desert of punishment that is inseparable from sin, and is non-transferable. The second aspect of the doctrine is the *reatus actualis*, that is, actual guilt. This denotes that aspect of guilt that is transferable and can be remitted by divine mercy. The Reformed Orthodox argued that the *reatus* (liability or propensity) that accompanies the *macula* (vitiating nature) of original sin simply is the obligation to punish a person because of their culpability. In which case, removal of liability to culpability entails removal of liability to punishment. Thus, for example, Francis Turretin:

Since culpability and punishment are related and guilt is nothing else than the obligation to punishment arising from culpability, they mutually posit and remove each other so that culpability and its guilt being removed, the punishment itself ought to be taken away necessarily (as it can be inflicted only on account of culpability). Otherwise culpability cannot be said to be remitted or its guilt taken away, if there still remains something to be purged from the sinner because of it.¹⁴

Turretin and the other Reformed Orthodox theologians maintained that the medieval distinction between *reatus culpae* and *poenae* was simply mistaken in bifurcating guilt in the manner in which it did. If guilt requires punishment, then no meaning can be given to a notion that seeks to distinguish between guilt and punishment in the way the medievals seemed to. Hence, in place of the medieval distinction, the Reformed orthodox spoke of potential and actual guilt as the two component parts of original guilt.

More recently, in the mid-twentieth century, Louis Berkhof, maintained a slightly different position from the Reformed orthodox, which appeared

to be more in keeping with the language of the medieval schoolmen, although, adapted for his own (Reformed) theological ends. He argues that the liability to guilt (*reatus culpae*) is non-transferable and is of the essence of sin even though God may forgive the sinner their sin. But the liability to punishment (*reatus poenae*) is transferable. The reason being that it relates to the penal sanction of the law and is therefore not of the essence of sin. Thus Berkhof:

By this [liability to punishment] is meant desert of punishment, or obligation to render satisfaction to God's justice for self-determined violation of the law. Guilt in this sense is not of the essence of sin, but is rather a relation to the penal sanction of the law. If there had been no sanction attached to the disregard of moral relations, every departure from the law would have been sin, but would not have involved liability to punishment. Guilt in this sense may be removed by the satisfaction of justice, either personally or vicariously. It may be transferred from one person to another, or assumed by one person for another.¹⁵

This means that a person could be guilty of a sin, even where that sin is not punishable. A person could be guilty of bigamy, say, in a society where bigamy is not punishable by law. Similarly, a person could be guilty of sinning against God, and that guilt remain (because it is non-transferable). Nevertheless, God could forgive this person as a result of the work of Christ. This means that the punishment they would have suffered had their sin not been forgiven (*reatus poenae*) is remitted because of the work of Christ. But the *reatus culpa* remains even after they are forgiven, and cannot be removed by the work of Christ. This aspect of guilt is, and remains, non-transferable.

The nineteenth century theologian Charles Hodge defends precisely this view in the following terms:

A man condemned at a human tribunal for any offence against the community, when he has endured the penalty which the law prescribes, is no less unworthy, his demerit as much exists as it did from the beginning; but his liability to justice or obligation to the penalty of the law, in other words, his guilt in that sense of the work, is removed. It would be unjust to punish him a second time for that offence.¹⁶

Evaluation of the three views

From what we have already said about the nature of guilt in the opening section of this essay it seems that the Reformed Orthodox are correct in assuming that guilt is non-transferable with respect to potential guilt. From this it follows that the medieval view of the transferability of *reatus culpa* is wide of the mark. Even if all that is meant by the medieval schoolmen is that this aspect of the *reatus* may be remitted, this also seems false. Guilt, as Berkhof points out, adheres to a person and remains; even once that person is forgiven (if they have been forgiven).

However, the medieval distinction between liability to guilt and to punishment is a useful distinction, as Berkhof shows, contrary to the majority opinion of the Reformed Orthodox.¹⁷ There is a difference between the liability to guilt a person has (which is non-transferable), and the liability to punishment that arises out of the liability to guilt. We might say that the liability to punishment supervenes upon the liability to guilt. If this is true, then Berkhof's understanding of the relationship between liability to guilt and punishment is the most helpful way of thinking about the nature of original guilt. It utilises the medieval distinction, but without the false medieval view that guilt may be transferred or remitted. But such a distinction does not seem very different from the Reformed Orthodox. The way in which Berkhof utilises the notion of liability to guilt (*reatus culpae*) sounds very similar to the notion of potential guilt (*reatus potentialis*) used by the Reformed Orthodox. Berkhof's use of the liability to punishment (*reatus poenae*) also sounds very similar to the Reformed Orthodox notion of actual guilt (*reatus actualis*). It appears that Berkhof retains something of the concepts involved in the Reformed Orthodox discussion, whilst re-appropriating the terminology of the medieval schoolmen, for his own purposes (purposes which, unfortunately, he does not reveal to his readers).

But Berkhof's view of original guilt is also problematic. The problem is not to do with his distinction between that aspect of original guilt that is in principle non-transferable (the *reatus culpae*), and that aspect which is transferable to Christ (the *reatus poenae*). As we have seen, Berkhof is correct to point out that there is some aspect to original guilt that must be non-transferable. The difficulty with Berkhof's solution to this problem is that it has no resources for providing an adequate expla-

nation of *how* Adam's guilt is transferred to his posterity in the first place. His claim that, '[t]he guilt of Adam's sin, committed by him as the federal head of the human race, is imputed to all his descendants' does nothing to alleviate this problem.¹⁸

The aspect of Adam's guilt that is transferable, the liability to punishment, is dealt with in Christ (or, one presumes, not at all). If Christ does not atone for Adam's sin, his guilt remains, and remains culpable. If he does atone for Adam's sin, his liability to be punished for his guilt is removed, but his liability to guilt for his sin remains. Nevertheless, his sin is atoned for. Presumably, according to Berkhof, it is this liability to punishment that is transferred to Adam's posterity in original guilt. It cannot be the liability to guilt that is transferred, since this is in principle non-transferable. But even if liability to punishment may be transferred to Adam's posterity, it is difficult to see how one of Adam's posterity may be liable to punishment for the guilt of a crime he did not commit. In any case, even if there is some way in which such an arrangement could be shown to be morally and juridically justifiable (and this has to be a fairly large 'if'), it is not the whole of Adam's guilt that is transferred to his posterity.¹⁹ Adam's liability to guilt remains inseparably his own. Nor is the aspect of original guilt that is transferred to Adam's posterity *their* guilt. It is an *alien* guilt (Adam's guilt), the punishment for which they, as well as Adam, have to serve. This is not a trivial issue. The traditional doctrine of original sin maintains that the sin imputed to (or inherited by) Adam's posterity is truly their sin too. In some way God brings it about that the sin of Adam is the sin of his posterity. It is on this basis that the imputation of that sin can be said to be just. They, like Adam, deserve punishment for having the condition of original sin, even if they never actually sin, because the condition of original sin that is passed to Adam's posterity is as much theirs as it is Adam's.²⁰ In the same way, original guilt must rightly belong to Adam's posterity, via imputation or inheritance, such that they are really and truly guilty of the sin of Adam.²¹ If this strong connection between Adam's guilt and the guilt of his posterity cannot be maintained, then the traditional doctrine of original guilt (and, *mutatis mutandis*, original sin) is unsustainable. So there seem to be serious questions hanging over the attempted resolution of the scholastic discussions of original guilt attempted by Berkhof.

This problem about the transference of guilt

from one person to another (and hence, its imputation from one person to another) is also a serious problem for the Reformed Orthodox position. On this view the potential guilt (*reatus potentialis*) remains with the individual, and cannot be remitted, despite the fact that actual guilt (*reatus actualis*) can be remitted by the work of Christ. So here too, there is a problem with how Adam's guilt can be transferred to his posterity, and which, if any, aspect of original guilt is transferable. Once again, even if actual guilt can be transferred to Adam's posterity, it still seems unjust that those born after the Fall have imputed to them the actual guilt of a sin they have not committed. The medieval schoolmen circumvent this problem by allowing that the liability to guilt is what is dealt with in Christ, whilst the liability to punishment has to be remitted by punishment served, or a moral life lived, either in this life, or in purgatory. But this makes the mistake of assuming that guilt is *in principle* transferable, which we have already seen is simply false. That is, the medieval view claims that the liability to guilt itself is transferred to Christ, which, as the Reformed Orthodox and Berkhof have shown, cannot be the case. This is the core aspect to original guilt that cannot be removed, remitted or transmitted to another.

So, it appears that all three of the scholastic views under consideration are unable to provide a watertight argument in favour of the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity. In fact, it seems that none of these three alternative positions on original guilt has any sustainable argument for this conclusion. This is a serious problem for a full-orbed doctrine of original sin.

A realist proposal on the nature of original guilt

What are we to make of the notion of original guilt in light of this discussion? We could, with Richard Swinburne, reject the notion wholesale as a theological accretion best discarded on account of being unhelpful or incoherent. However, there may be scope for rehabilitating original guilt utilising the language of scholastic theology, but recasting the argument. That is the task of this third section of the essay.

In his *Dogmatic Theology*, the nineteenth century American Calvinist divine W. G. T. Shedd argues for a realist doctrine of imputation, which offers a potential way out of the problems besetting the three traditional views of original guilt

examined thus far. In this, he follows Augustine, rather than the Reformed tradition, although without Augustine's doctrine of the seminal presence of all of humanity in Adam.²² His argument rests on the idea that the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity is just and moral if Adam and his posterity are in some kind of divinely ordained metaphysical union. This union depends on the whole of humanity sharing in a common human nature, which is propagated through natural generation. (Shedd is also a defender of a traducian view of the generation of souls. Although Augustinian realism does not require traducianism, he thinks it is helpful to his argument at this point.²³) Thus:

The total guilt of the first sin, thus committed by the entire race in Adam, is imputed to each individual of the race because of the indivisibility of guilt.... Supposing that the one human nature which committed the "one offence" (Rom. 5: 17-18) became a family of exactly a million individuals by propagation, it would not follow that each individual would be responsible for only a millionth part of the offence. The whole undivided guilt of the first sin of apostasy from God would be chargeable upon each and every one of the million individuals of the species alike.

His reasoning depends on the following sort of thought experiment. Where two people commit a murder, both are equally responsible for the death, and both equally share in the guilt of that crime. It is not that both share in a part of the guilt of that crime, say, 50% each, since each of the two murderers was equally responsible for the death of the person concerned. Rather, each of the criminals is wholly guilty, sharing together in the whole guilt of the crime they have jointly committed. Shedd continues:

For though the one common nature that committed the "one offence" is divisible by propagation, the offence itself is not divisible nor is the guilt of it. Consequently, one man is as guilty as another of the whole first sin, of the original act of falling from God. The individual Adam and Eve were no guiltier of this first act and of the whole of it than their descendants are; and their descendants are as guilty as they.²⁴

The argument seems to be this. Humanity shares a common nature that is defiled in the act of original sin. Thereafter, every instance of this generic human nature that is brought into existence will share in the same sin, the sin initiated by the first instance of this human nature, Adam's human nature. But this is rather difficult

to swallow. It requires the theologian to agree that there is some universal human nature that all human beings are instances of, and which can be adversely affected by the actions of one, and only one, human individual, that is, the first such individual. After the first act of sin, this human nature is marked in such a way that every subsequent instance of that nature will share in exactly the same sin. It is rather like a statue being marred by some vandal, such that every subsequent caste taken of that statue, and every replica of that statue made from these castes, will bear the mark of that instance of vandalism. Of course, were some other vandal to try to further disfigure one of the replicas of the statue, their subsequent act of vandalism could not affect all the other replicas, or the first statue. It would affect only that particular replica. The others would remain unaffected.

Shedd claims that a first, primal sin could affect the rest of humanity universally, in a way that subsequent acts of sin could not (even if they affected more than one individual, they do not affect every individual, since they do not affect individuals that no longer exist). However, he has not done enough to show that each individual human being after Adam partakes of the same human nature, albeit a human nature that is particularised in each individual. In other words, Shedd would have to do a lot more by way of metaphysical explanation to make his argument work as a piece of philosophical theology.

Problems with the realist solution

However, perhaps this can be done. (Shedd is not the only theologian to have attempted it. Most notably, Jonathan Edwards makes a similar sort of argument, using a doctrine of temporal parts, in his treatise on *Original Sin*. However here is not the place to enter into that argument.²⁵) Let us swallow deeply and assume that it can be done. What then? Shedd's argument is still open to a number of serious and potentially debilitating counter-arguments. First, it appears that he is guilty of the fallacy of composition. The parts of a whole do not necessarily share the properties of the whole. For instance, all the atoms of a cat are colourless. It does not follow from this that the cat is colourless. In the case of Adam and his posterity, the fact that Adam sins does not entail that all his posterity are (a) sinners, or (b) partake of *his* sin and *his* guilt. But, Shedd's argument does address this issue. It is not the individual Adam or

Abraham or Anselm that has the property 'original guilt' passed on to them. Rather, it is that each individual human being after the Fall of Adam has an individual essence that includes an instance of the human nature that has been vitiated by Adam's original sin.²⁶ So, the problem for Shedd is not that Adam or Abraham or Anselm are merely parts of a whole, the whole of humanity, which may or may not have the property of original guilt that these parts share in. Rather, the problem is that all these parts partake of a common human nature that is sinful after the first sin of Adam.

But this raises a second, related problem. The properties of a whole thing do not necessarily distribute to their parts. For instance, the cat, as a whole entity, is thinking (of its dinner). This does not mean that every part of the cat is thinking about its dinner. But here too, this problem does not quite capture the issue Shedd is driving at. It is not that each individual human being is a part of some greater whole, which may or may not share the property of being sinful with this particular part of that whole. Rather, it is that this individual human being (Adam, Abraham, Anselm), instantiates that universal human nature. The individual shares in a common human nature with every other human being, and, like every other human being, has the properties that this common human nature entails (plus those properties that individuates this human individual from all other individuals in their individual essence). If any individual human being failed to exemplify one or more of the properties of his generic human nature (whatever they may be), then they would fail to be human, since to be human, on Shedd's understanding of the matter, is to exemplify the properties of a human nature, including the properties entailed by original sin (including, on Shedd's account, original guilt).²⁷

A third problem has to do with why only *Adam's* original sin and guilt is transmitted to his posterity. Why is the guilt of Abraham not transmitted to Anselm, or the guilt of Anselm to Aquinas? But once again, this problem is sidestepped by Shedd's account. For, on this version of Augustinian realism, the first sin is the only sin that can affect the human nature that all subsequent human beings are instances of. Recall the example of the statue and the vandal. Only an act of desecration visited upon the first statue, from which the caste for all subsequent replicas of this statue are taken, could affect all the other, replica, statues. That is, all the subsequent 'instances' of the first statue are affected if the first statue is defaced. But if one of

the replica 'instances' of the statue is vandalised, this does not affect all the other replica statues. It cannot affect them all, because there are other replicas that already exist, having been taken from the caste of the first statue, which are not harmed by the second act of vandalism. There are also replicas which, perhaps, no longer exist because they have already been destroyed.

Shedd's version of realism appears to be arguing for something similar with respect to original guilt. Only the first, primal sin of Adam can affect the whole of humanity after him. Only the first sin can so disrupt human relations with God by introducing sin into the world, that God curses Adam and his posterity with original sin and guilt. All subsequent sin, however dreadful, and however much it affects vast swathes of humanity (in holocausts, disease, famine and so forth), cannot affect the whole of humanity as the first sin of Adam does. So Adam's sin gives rise to a marred human nature, which is instantiated thereafter by all fallen human beings. But, it might be thought, this does not address why it is that only the primal sin of Adam is transmitted to his posterity. Why not impute all of Adam's sins and guilt to the rest of humanity? One answer to this, along Augustinian realist lines, is that only the first, primal, sin of Adam is required to vitiate Adam's nature, and, as a consequence of this, the generic human nature of humanity. All sins thereafter are instances of actual sin committed by human persons (including the fallen Adam) with an already sinful human nature, a point that the account of the curse in Genesis 3 makes clear.

But this raises the most difficult question for Shedd's realism: what does this generic human nature consist in? Shedd does not say. But perhaps we can construct a notion of human nature that is compatible with Shedd's argument using the metaphysics of essentialism.²⁸ Following Alvin Plantinga, let us assume that the nature of a particular thing is one or more properties a thing has essentially.²⁹ (For present purposes, an essential property is a property a thing has to have in order to be that thing.) And let human nature post-Fall consist of a conjunctive property that includes among its conjuncts the following properties: being sinful, being conscious, being sentient and being an embodied creature. Then a human nature *sub lapsu* just is that conjunctive property that a particular human being exemplifies, along with any other properties that the particular individual has as part of their individual essence, that other individuals do not

have (being Aurelius Augustine, for instance). This seems promising. However as it stands, this will not do. For on this conception of human nature, all humans post-Fall are *essentially* sinful. That is, there is no possible world in which they could exist without being sinful. The reason is that being sinful is one of the conjuncts of a generic fallen human nature, and, as we have just seen, the nature of a thing is essential to that thing. Hence, on this view, being sinful is essential to every instance of fallen human being. But, as Thomas Morris has pointed out, being sinful is not part of the *kind essence* of humanity. (A kind essence is that set of essential properties, or conjunctive essential property a thing has to have in order to be part of a particular ontological kind, such as ‘humanity’, or ‘deity’, or ‘horse’.) That is, a particular concrete individual could be a human being without being sinful.³⁰ This is trivially true if Adam was a human being prior to the Fall. In which case, being sinful cannot be a conjunct of (the property of) a generic fallen human nature. It may be possible to circumvent this problem with an essentialist account of human nature that maintains merely that, as a consequence of Adam’s original sin, generic human nature has the accidental property ‘being sinful’, thereafter. This would avoid the problems with kind essences that Morris points out. It would also make room for a doctrine of Christ’s sinlessness, since, presumably, Christ could be human without the accidental property of sinfulness that all other human beings have after the Fall, as instances of generic *fallen* human nature.³¹

Let us apply this version of Shedd’s realist doctrine, coupled with an essentialist account of human natures to the scholastic discussion of the previous section.

First, original sin comprises a *macula*, or deformity of human nature. Original guilt, as we have seen, is traditionally thought to comprise a two-part *reatus*, of guilt and punishment for guilt (or potential and actual guilt). However, the language of *reatus*, or liability, is unhelpful. In the first section of the essay, I pointed out that liability does not entail guilt, although guilt entails liability. So, I shall avoid using the term ‘liability’. The scholastic distinction serves to explain how one aspect of guilt can be transferred to the rest of humanity and to Christ (for those who are ultimately saved), whilst another aspect remains attached to the sinner. This insight into original guilt can be retained without the unhelpful language of liability. The realist argument can be used to achieve

this outcome in the following way.

The human nature Adam’s sin vitiates has a *macula*, including original guilt, which is instantiated in every concrete individual human being thereafter (Christ excepted). This *macula*, including original guilt, is a contingent property of this generic fallen human nature. (It is contingent because it cannot be part of the kind essence of humanity.) Original guilt is not, on this basis, *transferred* or *imputed* from Adam to his posterity (as per the traditional scholastic views). Neither is it part of some collective forensic arrangement, ordained by God to facilitate the ‘imputation’ of sin and guilt (the Calvinistic federal view). Nor, on this version of realism, is all humanity somehow metaphysically or seminally present ‘with’ or ‘in’ Adam when he falls (Augustine’s version of realism). Rather, guilt becomes a contingent property of generic human nature after original sin. Christ’s finished work on the cross deals with the sin and guilt of all those members of humanity who are elect (or, for those who balk at language of election, for all those members of humanity who become believers and persevere in their faith). This removes the *punishment* due for their guilt (thereby accounting for the scholastic *reatus poenae*, or *reatus actualis*). But it does not remove the fact that this person is, with Adam, *guilty* of original sin. Adam and his posterity are, and remain, the ones who are guilty for original sin. More precisely, after Adam’s primal sin, human nature, including Adam’s post-Fall human nature as an instance of this generic fallen nature, has the property of original sin and guilt contingently. This is true given the fact that possession of a vitiated human nature is itself a sin, for which someone may be culpable. Adam and his posterity are all guilty of sin, even if they do not commit actual sin (because they die in infancy, or are severely mentally handicapped or some such).³² So, in virtue of the fact that generic fallen human nature has the property of sinfulness, guilt adheres to each instantiation of fallen generic human nature and remains, even if the culpable nature of that guilt is dealt with by the work of Christ. Thus, as well as that aspect of original guilt that is culpable, and may be dealt with by Christ, there is also a non-culpable aspect to guilt that remains with the sinner and cannot be remitted by the work of Christ (corresponding to the *reatus culpae* or *reatus potentialis*).

This version of Augustinian realism appears to be able to side-step one problem often raised against realist theories of the imputation of original sin,

namely, that the language of 'natures' appears to equivocate on a generic human nature and particular human natures belonging to particular individuals. Thus, for instance, Henri Blocher:

What the realist proposal tends to sweep under the carpet is the primary datum of individual responsibility, of individuality as such. Even if the language of the extreme realist were adopted, the difficult step would still be there: how do we move from seminal participation, or ideal nature, to the distinct existence of individuals? It is they who stand condemned as guilty.³³

From the foregoing argument it should be clear that by bringing in the metaphysics of essentialism, this sort of issue could be rebutted by at least one version of Augustinian realism.

An unresolved issue

There is one final problem. How can Christ's work deal with the culpability aspect of original guilt, if Christ's humanity is not an instance of the fallen generic human nature? That is, if Christ's humanity is sinless (or impeccable), it is not clear how Christ can deal with the culpability aspect of original guilt without that guilt being *transferred* or *imputed* to Christ on behalf of fallen humanity. For, if Christ has an unfallen human nature, then a version of the problem of transferring original guilt – specifically, the culpability aspect of guilt – is reconstituted in Christological terms. Guilt would have to be transferable from generic fallen human nature to Christ's unfallen human nature. This is a troublesome question, the treatment of which would require much more to be said about Christ's humanity and his work on the cross. But, as one says in these contexts, there is simply not the space to discuss that here.

Notes

- 1 Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 144–145. For an interesting recent systematic theological approach, see Henri Blocher *Original Sin, Illuminating The Riddle* (Leicester: IVP, 1997), especially, chs. 3 and 5.
- 2 William Wainwright has argued for this important point in greater detail in his essay, 'Original Sin' in *Philosophy and The Christian Faith*, (ed.) Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
- 3 Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, p. 145.

- 4 This has not been lost on theologians. G. C. Berkouwer remarks, 'Certainly it is one of the most elementary of legal maxims that we can never assign to a person a guilt for which he is not responsible. Do we throw out that maxim when we confess the doctrine of "original sin"?' *Studies in Dogmatics: Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 426.
- 5 We might add that this view of imitated sin and guilt is precisely what Pelagius maintained was the explanation of sin and guilt.
- 6 Berkouwer seems to think that every attempted explanation of original guilt ends up in 'self-excuse'. If he means by this that there can be no adequate explanation of original guilt, then original guilt must be rejected. See *Sin*, p. 523.
- 7 *Caveat Lector*: In the course of this essay, I shall often refer to original sin and original guilt. When the term original sin is used, this serves to designate the full-orbed traditional doctrine of original sin including original guilt. When original guilt is specified, it is that aspect of the traditional doctrine that is in view.
- 8 Often in the literature, reference is made to the Reformed, or, more broadly, Protestant, Scholastics. However, this terminology has been superseded in the recent literature on post-Reformation Protestant theology. In this literature, a distinction is made between Reformed (and Protestant) Scholasticism as a theological method, and Reformed (and Protestant) Orthodoxy, the content of the dogmatic systems espoused by these theologians. For more on these distinctions, see the *Introduction to Reformation and Scholasticism, An Ecumenical Enterprise* (eds.) Willam J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).
- 9 For useful summaries of this historical discussion see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1939), pp. 244 ff., (especially the Protestant and Reformed position), Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, Ill: Tan Books, 1960), Bk 2; §2; Ch. 2; 20–24 (conservative Roman Catholic position) and Otto Weber *Foundations of Dogmatics Vol. I*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), [ET of *Grundlagen der Dogmatik I* (1955)], Part 6: XIV: B (moderate Reformed). Pannenberg speaks of the decay of the traditional concept of original sin and guilt. But that is not a question I intend to address here. I am only interested in the coherence of the traditional view. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), [ET of *Systematische Theologie Band 2* (1991)], p. 235 ff.
- 10 Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics Vol. I*, p. 604.
- 11 Philip L. Quinn, 'Disputing the Augustinian Legacy: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Romans 5: 12–19' in Gareth B. Matthews, ed., *The Augustin-*

- ian Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 239.
- 12 Placaeus' position was condemned by the French synod meeting at Charenton in 1644. However, Placaeus maintained that the synod had not condemned his view as such, and sought to further refine it in light of the synod's ruling. For an account of this affair, and the relevant extract from the Charenton Synod's decision, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (trans.) George Musgrave Giger, (ed.) James T. Dennison Jr., (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 9: IX: v-vi, pp. 614-615.
 - 13 My use of the term 'medieval scholastics' here is a term of art. Of course, there was no monolithic medieval view on the subject. However, as with the Reformed Orthodox, there was a general consensus about the nature of this issue.
 - 14 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 1, 9: IV, pp. 595-596.
 - 15 This means that a person could be guilty of a sin, even where that sin is not punishable. A person could be guilty of bigamy, say, in a society where bigamy is not a criminal offence.
 - 16 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1874), II: VIII: §7, p.189. It seems that Berkhof has taken his own views from Hodge's discussion of the same issue, although Berkhof does not credit Hodge as the source of his own position.
 - 17 Although, as we shall see, the language of *liability* to guilt is unhelpful. It would be better to speak of that aspect of guilt that adheres to the guilty party and is non-transferable, and that aspect which is transferable, and may be punished in the person of a substitute. But, since the scholastic discussion uses terms like 'liability' with respect to liability to guilt, I shall retain them for present purposes.
 - 18 Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 246.
 - 19 Defenders of a classical federalist position on the imputation of sin and guilt could argue that Adam and his posterity are treated together, rather than individually. Perhaps God constitutes the whole of humanity one forensic collective for the purposes of imputation, dealing with sin and guilt collectively, rather than imputing sin and guilt to each individual. But apart from the arbitrary nature of such an arrangement (why impute only sin and guilt?) this does not show that Adam's guilt is transferable. At most, it shows that the collective may be liable for the sin of one of its members. As we have already seen, liability in such circumstances is not the same as guilt.
 - 20 I am distinguishing between the condition of original sin, a complex property that all humans are born with post-Fall, and actual sin. This is a consequence, but not a necessary consequence, of the condition of original sin. A person could have original sin and not actually sin because, say, they never have the chance to do so. This would be the case for children who die at birth, or very soon thereafter.
 - 21 It would not be sufficient for the theologian to advocate a theological instrumentalism at this juncture. Instrumentalism refers to the idea that, 'terms of thought and meaning are relative to the function they perform and that their validity or truth is determined by their efficacy.' (*OED* online: <<http://dictionary.oed.com/>>.) In this way, original guilt could be a useful fiction, but nothing more. This would clearly not be an adequate account of the metaphysics of sin, at least, not as traditionally construed.
 - 22 In *City of God* Bk. XIII, Ch. 3 Augustine claimed that it is human nature that is vitiated by original sin, not Adam as a concrete individual. But he annexed to this the idea that all humanity was seminally present in Adam. Shedd takes up the former, but not the latter, aspect of Augustine's doctrine.
 - 23 Traducianism is the view that human souls come into existence by natural generation from the parents. An act of special creation is not required in order to bring each new soul into existence.
 - 24 W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Third Edition, (ed.) Alan W. Gomes (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003 [1888]), Part 4, Ch. 5, p. 560.
 - 25 See, for instance, Oliver D. Crisp, 'On the theological pedigree of Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of imputation' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 308-327 and Paul Helm, *Faith and Understanding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), ch. 7.
 - 26 An individual essence comprises all those essential properties of a particular object which are properties that only one object can possess. See, for example, E. J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 101-103.
 - 27 This is not the only way of conceiving of the requirement for a particular thing to have the properties that make up its generic nature, or its individual essence. But it is sufficient for present purposes. For more on this matter, see Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics*, ch. 6.
 - 28 Essentialism is (roughly) the view that natures, or perhaps, created natures, have certain essential properties, and certain contingent, or accidental properties. For a clear account of theological essentialism, see Jay Welsey Richards, *The Untamed God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), ch. 3.
 - 29 Plantinga says, 'One property includes another if it is not possible that there be an object that has the first but not the second. Thus the property of being a horse includes the property of being an animal. The nature of an object can be thought of as a conjunctive property, including as conjuncts just those properties essential to that object. Accordingly, and object has a nature if it has any essential properties

- at all.' From *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: University of Marquette University Press, 1980), reprinted in *The Analytic Theist, An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, (ed.) James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 227, n. 1. See also Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), Ch. V.
- 30 A point raised by Thomas Morris. See, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), ch. 3.
- 31 Provided Christ does not have a fallen human nature. For a recent defence of the view that Christ cannot have a fallen (but not sinful) human nature, see Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), ch. 9.
- 32 I take it that possession of the property 'being intrinsically sinful' is itself a sin, and therefore culpable. Since all humans (bar Christ) after the Fall have this property, all humans are guilty of sin even if they never actually sin.
- 33 Blocher, *Original Sin*, p. 115.

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