

Introduction

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Why think about Sin in the 21st century? We have surely left Sin and such associated beliefs and morality behind? So would argue those who see themselves in the continuing wake of the Enlightenment, rationality and science. The atheist, agnostic and secularist especially could be affronted by any such discussion or even the raising of the question of Sin.

And yet, as we know, most of the world are not strong secularists, most are not atheists, most are not enlightenment-derived 100% pure rationalists. The rise in fundamentalism and strong belief has meant that faith-based collectives and communities are explicitly accounted for in a number of bureaucratic settings and the global trend in the uptake of 'diversity'. It is not necessarily belief which is put under scrutiny but what one believes and how such belief plays out in public life. Moreover, regardless of the belief, it is the loyalty and faithfulness to how the subject acts in accordance with the belief *par excellence* which is under scrutiny. So, on the one hand, the vast majority of the global population live within varying degrees of interpretative frameworks wherein there are some forms of religious laws and beliefs as to what humans should and should not do. This does not mean these are followed in either an orthodox or orthopraxis fashion, but they do exist as hermeneutic frames to live within or against, such as deliberate acts of impiety. Sin therefore (in its varying permutations as transgression against a divine or transcendental law) is a cultural and social experience that continues in varying forms of intensity for the vast majority in this world.

Yet there is also the other way we think about 'sin' and that is as a type of secular noun and verb, as a cultural catch-all for that which is taken to be wrong or transgressive against cultural and societal norms, as both intentional act of defiance and identity and as a type of secular sin of omission – that is, the neglecting of doing what is deemed right. It is too easy – and perhaps a bit fashionable – to thumb one's nose at trends and modes of populism. However, let us take the time to think about an interesting sin which goes unchecked: sexism. Is not the popularity of #metoo at the very least a form of consciousness raising regarding the harassment and violence towards women and sexually fluid/diverse

communities, that also draws attention to the insidious process of how this sin is carried out?

It is perhaps sins of omission – for example, the bystander or passive witness to racism and sexism – that have the widest impact on our lives and society today and these are the sins of omission committed under structural and governmental sin: where institutions and governments neglect (perhaps intentionally, perhaps by default – or even by the excuse of ‘difficult choices’) to do what is right. Central to such Sin are the sins of omission (and overproduction) of power: where that and those with power do not do what is right – and this is especially so in regard to environmental sin.

Sin therefore can be regarded as much as socio-cultural act and sensibility a theological one; socio-cultural because the continuation of implicit and explicit religiosity, the continuation of claims, effects and affects of belief, provide an ongoing resource, issue, problem and claims of alternatives to what is often taken to be a secular, political and capitalist status-quo. Continental thought has always been open to engaging with, using and debating questions and issues of religiosity and belief and so this issue asks, what does it mean to think ‘Sin’ today? Is it the case, as in the song by Maria Mckee “You Gotta Sin To Get Saved”?¹ It seems that to ‘get saved’ one has to enter into and traverse sin, that is, be willing to be – to some extent – sinful. So just like being saved, sin demands an overconformity with social, political and cultural ‘laws’ in order to traverse them. One can know that being sinful is good for one’s character only when the laws are traversed and then obeyed again. This is where the individual and the social merge.

Of course, there are sins and there are *sins*. This issue considers sin as more than a negative mode of being, it is also social and a condition for being in a complex world.

The contributions in this issue all consider sin as a noun and as a verb – it is a modality of thinking and of action, both of which are often in discontinuity.

¹ See (or rather, hear): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niFRb_cLbVc