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THE NECESSITY AND DETRIMENT OF SHAME
AS PRESENTED IN JOHN CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

By Tova Cohen

Professor Luis Salés
Professor Oona Eisenstadt
Professor Jerry Irish

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

Department of Religious Studies
Scripps College
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Introduction: The Why

When contemplating thesis topics last September, I certainly never thought I would choose to write on John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. As a Jewish person who loves and greatly identifies with her faith, Calvin's theology stood out as a complete foil to the religiosity that I knew so well. It was this foreignness, however, that drew me in. When I began my thesis journey eight months ago, I recall wanting to write about a topic completely unexplored during my academic career as a Religious Studies major at the Claremont Colleges. Unsurprisingly, most professors and friends advised me against trudging onto unmarked territory for the lofty, time-consuming project that is senior thesis. If anything, their hesitancy propelled my research forward, and before I knew it, I was knee-deep in Calvin's *Institutes*, my eyes dry and burning from reading the 1,200-page text. This decision was not made in an attempt to desecrate my Jewish roots, nor was it made to *prove* anything to anyone. Instead, it was made out of my personal intrigue in John Calvin. To me, Calvin was a Christian anomaly, whose teachings seemed to contradict everything I had learned from my Jesus-loving friends. Sarah Grace Engel certainly wouldn't say that humans are inherently evil, so where is Calvin coming from, and why does my dear friend's Christian practice look so vastly different from his? I knew I had to find out the possible answers.

In addition to my personal inner dialogue pertaining to John Calvin's strangely militant and punishing Christianity, I was also interested in Calvin's legacy. Although he is well known among religious scholars, I think it's safe to say that John Calvin has truly been overshadowed by his contemporary, Martin Luther. While the average layperson can identify the man who nailed his ninety-five theses on a Catholic church door in 16th century Europe, it seems as though only history buffs or Christian devotees can provide a comprehensive understanding of Calvin's

theology. In a way, I viewed Calvin as the “underdog” of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, and, in honesty, I can understand why he may have been just that: his theology was simply not as accessible as Luther’s. Calvin’s religiosity is grim. He believed that one is plagued by his/her own wretchedness, helplessly stuck in an endless cycle of misery and the inability to progress. So, I understand why my professors joked of masochism (and sadism, since they would eventually have to read the finished product) when I relayed my plan to commit the entirety of my senior year to Calvin. Not only is his content damning, but his writing style is dry and repetitive (albeit not nearly to the degree of Luther’s). However, despite all of the reasons above, I pursued Calvin in hopes of understanding his theology; and if I couldn’t have understanding, I’d settle for respect. Eight months later, I have found both in Calvin’s work. No, this does not mean that I am ready to abandon my beloved Judaism for Calvinism, but it also doesn’t mean that I refute Calvin’s message in its entirety. While I am in no way an expert—far from it—I feel that many read Calvin looking for logical error or psychologically-harmful content (like I have done in this essay), but without also acknowledging the validity of some of his beliefs. No, the thought that human beings are innately brutish and depraved is not a comfortable one. However, we would be ignorant to claim the exact inverse.

History serves as a perfect “case study” in exhibiting human propensity to enact evil. Throughout the ages, humans have been morally tested through war, social intolerance, and natural disaster, and let’s face it—we have not passed with flying colors. Take the current COVID-19 outbreak for example: Li Wenliang, the Chinese doctor who initially found the virus, was accused of libel and threatened by his own government to revoke his claims, even though his

findings had the potential to save thousands of lives from the onset.¹ In early April, news broke that the Chinese government had concealed the extent of the epidemic by intentionally underreporting their growing number of cases and fatalities.² As of April 23rd, 2020, the virus had afflicted over 2.5 million people and had claimed 170,000 lives worldwide.³ While it would be easy to place all of the blame on the Chinese government, the fact of the matter is that the rest of the world has not proven to be particularly conscientious either. At the start of ‘social distancing’ and ‘stay-at-home orders,’ many young people took advantage of low airplane ticket prices and empty beaches, completely ignoring recommendations made by the CDC and comparable public health agencies outside of the United States.⁴ Not only does this portray human selfishness, for these measures have been implemented to protect those who are elderly and/or immunosuppressed from the virus, but it also displays the unsubstantiated belief that we, humans, are invincible.

Seeing as this essay engages a psychological perspective, I feel it only fit to dive into the psychology behind one’s hubris with regard to his/her immortality. In an article written by Susan Krauss, she elaborates on how misplaced pride can lead to one’s demise. She states:

“The myth of invincibility relates to the notion of the personal fable. Psychologist David Elkind coined this term to refer to the tendency of adolescents to engage in endless egocentric fantasies.

If you believe in the personal fable, you see yourself as the hero or heroine of your life story, and

¹ Westcott, Ben. “How Chinese Doctor Li Wenliang Died Twice in China's State Media.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 7 Feb. 2020, www.cnn.com/2020/02/06/asia/china-li-wenliang-whistleblower-death-timeline-intl-hnk/index.html.

² Yang, Dali L. “Analysis | Wuhan Officials Tried to Cover up Covid-19 - and Sent It Careening Outward.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 10 Mar. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/10/wuhan-officials-tried-cover-up-covid-19-sent-it-careening-outward/.

³ Wu, Jiachuan, and Nigel Chiwaya. “Coronavirus Map: The COVID-19 Virus Is Spreading across the World. Here's Where Cases Have Been Confirmed.” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 6 Apr. 2020, www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/coronavirus-map-confirmed-cases-2020-n1120686.

⁴ Montgomery, David, and Manny Fernandez. “28 Texas Students Have Coronavirus After Spring Break Trip.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 1 Apr. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/us/coronavirus-texas-austin-spring-break-cabo.html.

imagine that others see you that way as well. Thus, it's a direct outgrowth of early development. Through experience and maturation, most individuals (the non-narcissistic ones) gain a more realistic and measured view of their own importance."⁵

What "experience" is Dr. Whitbourne referring to? The experience of failure. She explains: "Once you see yourself as the inevitable hero or victor, you'll fail to prepare yourself for the reality of what might end up being a very challenging situation,"⁶ which is what reckless individuals in the age of COVID-19 are now grappling with. Those spring-breakers who gambled with fate for a discounted vacation to the Bahamas? Many of them are now positive with COVID-19, posing a threat to themselves as well as to the rest of society.⁷ In a sense, they 'failed' their test of immunity and infallibility. Surely these individuals displayed narcissistic characteristics in their negligence, but we would be naïve to assert that each and every one of us haven't been one of these spring-breakers at some point in our lives. Let's start with less extreme examples: throwing a candy wrapper out of your car window, thinking "what harm could come from one more piece of trash?" Going to a potluck empty-handed, assuming that there will be enough food and drink to satisfy the party's guests without your own contributions. Inviting everyone in your office out for drinks, except for one odd coworker, betting on the slim chance that she doesn't find out. Then again, if she does, who cares right? In all of these seemingly small acts of selfishness, people get hurt. Littering dirties our streets and disrupts our ecosystems, affecting everyone. Not bringing the food and drink you signed up to bring defeats the point of potluck, affecting everyone. Purposefully excluding someone from your after-work plans can make them feel ostracized and has the potential to disturb the office dynamic, affecting

⁵ Whitbourne, Susan Krauss. "Narcissism and the Myth of Invincibility." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 9 Feb. 2016, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201602/narcissism-and-the-myth-of-invincibility.

⁶ Whitbourne, "Narcissism and the Myth of Invincibility."

⁷ Montgomery, David, and Manny Fernandez. "28 Texas Students Have Coronavirus After Spring Break Trip."

everyone. The more extreme examples of such acts follow a similar pattern: seeing your drug addiction as “your problem and no one else’s,” even if it completely dismantles the lives of your loved ones. Committing a crime without first considering the long-term consequences of your actions. No, we are not all narcissists, but we all have done prideful, ignorant things to other people’s detriment.

Knowing this, what should we do when we “fail the test” of our invincibility? While not everyone’s solution, many people turn to God. Dr. Whitbourne states: “in relationships, invincibility leads you to ignore potential weaknesses in the way you and your partner manage difficulties. You may feel like you’re the one who deserves special treatment and therefore fail to engage in the kind of give-and-take that keeps relationships thriving,” which is precisely how John Calvin perceives our fragmented relationship with God: “But through the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie, due arrangement requires that we treat of the former in the first place, and then descend to the latter.”⁸ If God is not properly revered, then one cannot “thrive” to his/her potential. In Christianity, and the other Abrahamic religions for that matter, the self and God are intertwined; while hurting the self doesn’t necessarily *hurt* God, turning away from God certainly hurts us. Thus, when religious individuals find themselves on the other side of a difficult situation, they often say, “God saved me.” To them, God is the sole creditor for their healing, for as Calvin suggested, one cannot improve without Divine aid. Surely, a multitude of issues present themselves when this logic is used, for the phrase “God saved me” completely undercuts human effort and struggle by solely awarding success to an intangible entity. Why should God be credited for curing someone of COVID-19 and not the doctors who treated him? Or the wonders of modern medicine? To a person of faith, these two are one and the same. Calvin claims: “Miracles and faith are used to

⁸ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (I.I.3).

denote the same thing,”⁹ meaning that if anything, earthly phenomena are *proof* of God’s omnipotence.

Because “we have nothing of our own, but depend entirely on God,”¹⁰ we must remain humble in the face of success and achievement. While it may be easy to shower oneself with flattery in these moments, Calvin reminds us of the dangers of an inflated self-esteem, as previously examined by Dr. Whitbourne: “Whosoever, therefore, gives heed to those teachers who merely employ us in contemplating our good qualities, so far from making progress in self-knowledge, will be plunged into the most pernicious ignorance.”¹¹ Seeing as blind confidence in the self only leads to despair, Calvin proposes the following: “the search which divine truth enjoins...leave us devoid of all means of boasting, and so incline us to submission. This is the course which we must follow.”¹² Calvin elaborates that this road not only involves a rejection of self-assurance, but invites us “to contemplate what must overwhelm us with shame—our miserable destitution and ignominy.”¹³ And, as we have explored in the examples above, we have good reason to be ashamed with ourselves. This introduces the crux of this essay’s argument: the necessity and detriment of shame in John Calvin’s theological edifice.

To deconstruct shame as it appears in Calvin’s work, I utilize both volumes of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as my primary source text.¹⁴ The motif of shame in Calvin’s *Institutes* begins with his discussion of original sin, for our depraved designation begets the shame we internalize. If we weren’t deemed wretched by the doctrine of original sin, we wouldn’t have a reason to be ashamed of our inherent state of being. To further develop these

⁹ (III.II.9)

¹⁰ (II.I.1)

¹¹ (II.I.2).

¹² (II.I.2).

¹³ (II.I.2).

¹⁴ I will be referring to WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company’s 1962 print edition of *Institutes*.

arguments, I refer to the Latin Vulgate's translation of Genesis in the second chapter of this thesis.¹⁵ I want to clarify the purpose of this essay. It does *not* serve to accuse Calvin of shaming his disciples, but instead serves to comment on shame as an integral aspect of Christian practices, both past and present, as construed by John Calvin and his successors. Furthermore, I will not try to prove that religious shame is always harmful, but will instead discuss the potential consequences, both positive and negative, that shame entails.

¹⁵ All biblical references in this essay are from an English-translated, online-accessible version of the Latin Vulgate, unless otherwise specified.

John Calvin's Original Sin

“Original Sin, then, may it be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh.”¹⁶

We are all too familiar with the serpent's trickery that tempted Eve in Eden, ultimately leading to her and Adam's exile from paradise. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) first developed the doctrine of original sin on the basis of this biblical narrative, which would subsequently define much of western Christian theological anthropology.¹⁷ The Augustinian hamartiology is this: Adam and Eve were created good in God's image; they gave into sinful temptations and fell from God's grace, thus reversing their (and our) inherently good nature. Therefore, humans, as a result of Adam's folly, are now naturally wretched.¹⁸ You may ask yourself: *why must Adam, and thus humankind, suffer so severely from a momentary lapse in character?* To Augustine, and later to Calvin, this event was not an isolated offense, but one that reflects multiple ill-intentioned inner workings of the human mind and soul, resulting in the ultimate betrayal of the Divine.¹⁹ These theologians highlight three major contributing factors to the demise of humankind: pride, ambition, and concupiscence, all of which spring from the unforgiveable sin of infidelity.²⁰ And thus, Adam's vain confidence and desire for mortal knowledge brought us to our current state of depravity, in which pride, ambition, and concupiscence, as a result of unbelief, run rampant. Since evil cannot fight evil, we must rely on the goodness of God, and God alone, to fix our wretched designation.²¹ It is from this display of complete depravity and

¹⁶ *Institutes* (II.I.8).

¹⁷ O'Donnell, James. “St. Augustine: Christian Bishop and Theologian.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 19 Feb. 2020, www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Augustine.

¹⁸ Pitkin, Barbara. *Nothing But Concupiscence: Calvin's Understanding of Sin and the Via Augustini*. pp.349-350. (II.I.3).

²⁰ (II.I.4,8).

²¹ (II.I.9).

total reliance on the grace of the Trinitarian persons that John Calvin shapes the skeleton of his original sin doctrine. This chapter examines the etiology of Calvin's doctrine of original sin and the doctrine itself, comprising three major elements: wretchedness, grace, and predestination. After I lay the foundation of Calvin's appropriation of original sin, the incoherence of these three concepts will be made evident, threatening the integrity of his theological edifice.

Background Information

Humanism

Calvin's conceptual apparatus was extensively defined by his commitments to a rising humanism, and specifically, particularist humanism, which Donald Williams characterizes for its "strong interest in the classical writers *from the standpoint of grammar and rhetoric*, rather than that of dialectic which categorized the schoolmen."²² In humanism, there are two main branches: general and particular.²³ General humanism argues for individual free will and independent self-betterment, while particular humanism reflects the commitment to humanist-inspired rhetoric and methods of writing.²⁴ Although Calvin maintained his particularist views throughout his religious career, the rest of Europe, Martin Luther included, used the theory of general humanism to defend their dissent from the Catholic Church, claiming that human beings have the autonomy to seek God independently from religious authority.²⁵ Martin Luther advocated for the use of vernacular German in disseminating his theology for the sake of accessibility; Calvin continued to write in the traditional Latin in order to uphold religious custom and pay tribute to his

²² Williams, Donald T. "John Calvin: Humanist and Reformer: The Influence of Calvin's Early Humanism on His Work as a Christian Theologian." *Trinity Journal*, vol. 5, Spr 1976, pp. 68.

²³ Williams 67

²⁴ Williams 67

²⁵ Birch, T. Bruce. "Informing vs. Reforming: Erasmus vs. Luther." *Review & Expositor*, vol. 34, no. 2, Apr. 1937, pp. 158

humanist roots.²⁶ In sum, humanism to Luther was individualism, while Calvin's humanism encompassed the preservation of a distinct literary tradition.

Politics

Calvin's interpretations are highly appropriated by humanist thinkers of the European Reformation. In a sense, his writings serve as a response to self-important ideology begot by the spread of general humanism. Therefore, Calvin's foundational views on original sin and human wretchedness were a response to the intellectual climate of Europe in the wake of Luther's Reformation, first mobilized in 1517 and resulting in a permanent schism four years after at the Council of Worms.²⁷ Fifteen years later, Calvin entered the theological arena with the publication of his *Institutes*, while the English Reformation, championed by King Henry VIII and given its preliminary doctrinal outlines by Cardinal Wolsey, led to the closure and dispossession of monastic communities across the realm. Simultaneously, further dissenting groups of Irish Catholics pushed for political and religious reform, albeit within the framework of the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical community.²⁸ Therefore, Lutheranism and other forms of Protestantism spread throughout continental Europe in the place of Catholicism, and Henry took it upon himself to spearhead the Protestant Reformation throughout what would be considered the United Kingdom today.²⁹ With this came the weakening of the Roman Catholic Church, an influx of critics of the Catholic clergy, as well as a Catholic counter-reformation.³⁰ While Calvin certainly did not agree with the Catholic Church—hence dissociating himself from it around 1533³¹—he was also in disagreement with his Protestant counterparts.³² However, while most of

²⁶ Williams 68

²⁷ Bernard, G. W. *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, p. 390.

²⁸ Bernard 390.

²⁹ Davie, Martin. *Calvin's Influence on the Theology of the English Reformation*, p. 318.

³⁰ Bernard 390.

³¹ The exact date of his conversion is disputed among scholars.

Calvin's qualms with German Lutheranism lie in its implementation of general humanism, like Luther, Calvin was a staunch proponent for democracy and aristocracy over religious governance.³³ Calvin additionally advocated for secular learning in addition to study of the Lord's word, which was also in accordance with Lutheran politics.³⁴ His interest in separating Church and State, in addition to the popularization of Protestantism over Catholicism, fostered the rapid dissemination of Calvin's doctrine across the European continent.

Society

It was also during this time period that humanist philosophers became very vocal and active in communities across Europe. Erasmus, specifically, was an interesting figure in that he vehemently criticized the Catholic Church, while also opposing the Christian schism created by Calvin and Luther.³⁵ He remained an active member in the Catholic Church, upholding traditional customs of honoring the papacy as "mediums" between God and mortal beings; however he simultaneously rejected divine determinism, claiming that human beings held some autonomy in changing their fate.³⁶ Timothy Gwin maintains: "While Calvin's rhetorical nuance appears to be heavenward, focused upon the sovereign God he beheld in the Scriptures, Erasmus's focus appears to be earthbound towards the church that cost the God of Scripture His Son."³⁷ Characters such as Erasmus were perplexing to the Protestant Reformers, who saw him as both feeding into the corrupt politics of the Church and falling victim to the general humanist trap, into which so many other philosophers of their day fell.³⁸ Erasmus's unconventional ideology aside, Calvin's chief enemies of his day were Scholastics, for they also relied too much

³² Bouwsma, William J. "John Calvin." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 4 Feb. 2020, www.britannica.com/biography/John-Calvin.

³³ Britannica

³⁴ Britannica

³⁵ Timothy Gwin. *The Theological Foundation and Goal of Piety in Calvin and Erasmus* p.147

³⁶ Gwin 143-144

³⁷ Gwin, 143

³⁸ Gwin 144-145

on human reason and capability, rather than the teachings of God,³⁹ making “their teachings...lifeless and irrelevant to a world in desperate need.”⁴⁰ However, this instance of social tension did not nearly amount to what Calvin and other Reformers would soon face: it would only be a mere nine years before the Council of Trent (1545) was held, which signified the official Counter-Reformation in Europe.⁴¹ Therefore, it can be surmised that *Institutes* was equal parts theological and political in nature. So much for Calvin’s theopolitical context; but how did his personal life define his conceptualization of human nature?

Personal

Calvin had a very disadvantaged childhood and early adulthood. He lost his mother at a young age, and shortly thereafter, his father as well, who put a great deal of pressure on Calvin and his brothers to join the priesthood.⁴² Calvin’s manner was meek and antisocial. Many described him as reticent, yet there is evidence that he could, at times, also be precocious and a good friend.⁴³ Regardless, as a student he was reserved and uncurious, which were valued characteristics in his early childhood religious education, and would later be valued in his own theology.⁴⁴ Reticent traits in a child can reflect experienced trauma and emotional repression, which rings true for Calvin. Unfortunately, Calvin’s emotional burden became greater in his adulthood. First, his journey to theology was tumultuous: he went from dabbling in religious life to becoming a humanist lawyer, until he eventually became a doctrinal apologist.⁴⁵ His early writings in favor of Seneca’s stoicism were not publicly well received, abruptly ending his career

³⁹ Britannica

⁴⁰ Britannica

⁴¹ Bernard 390.

⁴² Canlis 3

⁴³ Canlis 3

⁴⁴ Canlis 3

⁴⁵ Britannica

as a humanist philosopher.⁴⁶ Aside from his career struggles, Calvin lost his wife to illness at the beginning of his career as a theologian in Basel.⁴⁷ In brief, his perhaps seemingly bleak doctrine of original sin was consistent with his devastating personal tragedies, as he might have understood them within his ideological humanist framework.

Introduction to JC Theology

Distinctions between Augustine and Calvin

Although John Calvin's theology earned recognition and a substantial following, his ideas were largely inspired by Augustinian concepts. Like Augustine,⁴⁸ Calvin focused on original sin, particularly within the context of human depravity under God's greatness. However, the two theologians' understanding of original sin differs in important regards. Calvin was particularly interested in knowledge of God and the self, which led to his in-depth exploration of explicit vs. implicit knowledge of original sin.⁴⁹ Therefore, unlike Augustine, Calvin focuses much more on human will and nature, as well as God's paramount role in directing our action and behavior. On the topic of original sin, Calvin ascertains that: "it is impossible to deny that God foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree... The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should: why he deemed it meet, we know not."⁵⁰ And, because Calvin believes free will is dictated by the Divine, Augustine's assertion that pride and concupiscence lie at the heart of Adam's fall—while still upheld by Calvin—fails to encompass the complexity of original sin.⁵¹ Pitkin explains that "In the 1559 Institutes, Calvin stresses, after citing Romans 5:12, that Adam revolted, 'not only because he was seized by Satan's blandishments, but also

⁴⁶ Britannica

⁴⁷ Canlis 8

⁴⁸ see next section for description of him

⁴⁹ Pitkin 349.

⁵⁰ (III.XXIII.7-8).

⁵¹ Pitkin 351

because, contemptuous of truth, he turned aside to falsehood,”⁵² suggesting that despite his access to Godly ‘truth,’ he “turn[ed] aside to falsehood,” marking the apex of betrayal. This is why Calvin, while still very much incorporating pride and concupiscence, defines the culprit of original sin to be infidelity above all else.⁵³

Other inconsistencies between the two theologians’ beliefs lie in the transmission of original sin as well as their doctrines of predestination. While both parties agree that human depravity is hereditary, relieving no one of its affliction, Calvin disagrees with the Augustinian assessment that the sinful nature of this congenital transmission is rooted in sexual acts: “We do not hold Christ to be free from all taint, merely because he was born of a woman unconnected with a man, but because he was sanctified by the Spirit, so that the generation was pure and spotless, such as it would have been before Adam’s fall.”⁵⁴ In making this distinction, Calvin mitigates Augustine’s dualistic beliefs regarding the embodiment of sin; for Calvin, sin is not limited to the flesh and the mind, respectively, but to both, symbiotically.⁵⁵ Finally, Calvin pushed Augustine’s doctrine of divine election further, as James Wetzel maintains: “If there is no intelligible motive in justice to move God to withhold grace, then perhaps Augustine should have gone the route of ‘double’ predestination, where damnation and redemption alike are impenetrable mysteries of divine election.”⁵⁶ Calvin adopts this notion of ‘double’ predestination, which is less vexing than the claims of ‘single’ predestination. The latter postulates that God does not damn those who are not divinely elected, while the former presents damnation as the only other possibility outside of salvation.⁵⁷ In other words, Calvin’s doctrine

⁵² Pitkin 351

⁵³ Pitkin 351

⁵⁴ (II.XIII.4).

⁵⁵ Pitkin 363

⁵⁶ Wetzel, “Snares of Truth: Augustine on free will and predestination,” p.129

⁵⁷ Pitkin 129.

of predestination relies on a more consistently logical framework than Augustine's, and Calvin utilizes his nuanced interpretations of predestination to essentially shape his theology.

Components unique to Institutes

Calvin's doctrine of double predestination was shaped around the historical context of 16th century Europe. Based on the background information above, it is clear that Calvin aimed to break all ties with the Catholic Church, establishing a faith in which "paying one's dues" in the form of indulgences was not a replacement for egregious wrongs.⁵⁸ In order to remove any and all conflicts of class, moral superiority over others, and false guarantees of salvation, Calvin introduced predestination as a less competitive and more faith-based alternative.⁵⁹

Unsurprisingly, the idea of one having no control over his/her fate could cause much anxiety and concern, which Calvin encourages us to openly embrace.⁶⁰ As we dive into a further exploration of Calvin's theology, it becomes evident that embracing such a reality proved to be challenging for the theologian as well.

Lastly, Calvin devotes much of his *Institutes* to creation as well as religious practice after the death of Jesus Christ. Thus, his works are essentially divided into two categories: commentary on God and commentary on Jesus.⁶¹ Within the context of creation, no mention of Jesus is made. However, Jesus is the only divine person mentioned in his book on salvation. What is particularly fascinating about Calvin's different designations between God and Christ is that God continues to hold the greatest power—"God the author of death"⁶²—while Christ serves God as His mediator between Heaven and Earth: "we are not justified by the mere grace of the Mediator, and that righteousness is not simply or entirely offered to us in his person, but that we

⁵⁸ (III.XX.9).

⁵⁹ (III.XXI.1).

⁶⁰ (III.III.7).

⁶¹ Mesa 179. Note: the Holy Spirit is also discussed, but not often and certainly not in depth.

⁶² (II.I.6).

are made partakers of divine righteousness when God is essentially united to us.”⁶³ This could explain why Calvin’s concept of grace is so interwoven in Christology; in order to obtain grace, one must embody Jesus,⁶⁴ which becomes particularly interesting in our upcoming discussion on the connection between grace and predestination. While Calvin believes Jesus can bestow salvation and grace upon another, he still holds God to be the Divine elector.⁶⁵ With regard to the Holy Spirit, Calvin says little. However, the commentary that he does provide states the following: “the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually binds us to himself.”⁶⁶ Calvin refers to the “secret operation of the Holy Spirit” as a means to ensure our salvation. This ‘operation’ that Calvin speaks to consists in faith and faith alone.⁶⁷ The Spirit, however, is only as potent as “our Head,” or Calvin’s title for Jesus Christ.⁶⁸ When speaking of Christ’s purifying power, Calvin makes the case:

“To *justify*, therefore, is nothing else than to acquit from the charge of guilt, as if innocence were proved. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ.”⁶⁹

Alternatively, Christ and the embodiment of Christ bring us closer to righteousness and grace, but Christ’s salvation does not restore us to our Edenic state of being. This, according to Calvin, can only be performed by God Himself: “we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath prepared; again intimating by these words, that all the fruits of good works are

⁶³ (III.XI.5).

⁶⁴ (II.VI.4).

⁶⁵ (III.XI.1-2).

⁶⁶ (III.I.1)

⁶⁷ (III.I.1)

⁶⁸ (III.I.1)

⁶⁹ (III.XI.3).

originally and immediately from God' (Eph.ii.10)."⁷⁰ While Calvin's Holy Trinity is not the topic of this paper, offering some insight into his God vs. Christ belief system may enrich the analyses to come.

The From Nature/Natural Debate and its Application to Calvin's Triad

Throughout the text, Calvin relies on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to reconcile the strength and extent of human free will, nature, and virtue, which is textually supported by the following passage from *Institutes*:

"We say, then, that man is corrupted by a natural viciousness, but not by one which proceeded from nature. In saying that it proceeded not from nature, we mean that it was rather an adventitious event which befell man, than a substantial property assigned to him from the beginning. We, however, call it natural to prevent any one from supposing that each individual contracts it by depraved habit, whereas all receive it by a hereditary law."⁷¹

We can surmise the following premises from these claims:

- 1) Humans were good *from* nature
- 2) Wretchedness is only attributed to us and our behavior
- 3) Such wretchedness is *natural* to our being, but not *from* nature

With the above quotation and premises in mind, I will now explore Calvin's conceptions of free will and human nature as presented in the three key elements of his theological edifice: wretchedness, grace, and predestination. Because the latter two aspects of his edifice rest upon the consequences of original sin, we begin our discussion with its most immediate product: wretchedness.

⁷⁰ (II.III.6).

⁷¹ (II.1.11).

Wretchedness

Calvin's original sin postulates that human beings are inherently depraved, thus sparking conversation as to what categorizes 'natural' wretchedness versus wretchedness, obtained. To begin, Calvin frames human depravity as embodied sin: "All parts of the soul were possessed by sin, ever since Adam revolted from the fountain of righteousness...abominable impiety seized upon the very citadel of the mind, and pride penetrated to his inmost heart."⁷² Calvin's anthropological interpretation of human wretchedness mirrors his beliefs in the ontological transmission of depravity from one generation to the next. He, alongside Augustine, elaborates the physical extent to which depravity takes its toll, claiming that the damage is so great that a restoration of innate goodness in humankind would necessitate creation of our species anew: "His words are, 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them' (Ezek.xxxvi.26, 27)."⁷³

Physical wretchedness is explored further in Calvin's description of congenital sin: "It should be enough for us to know that Adam was made the depository of the endowments which God was pleased to bestow on human nature, and that, therefore, when he lost what he had received, he lost not only for himself but for us all."⁷⁴ Calvin describes Adam as a "depository" to highlight that the transmission of his sin to the human gene pool at large was through his infected seed.⁷⁵ This falls in alignment with Augustine's belief that sin resides in sexual acts.⁷⁶ This may serve as an explanation for Christ's righteousness, since Adam's seed did not infiltrate Mary's otherwise

⁷² (II.II.9).

⁷³ (II.III.6).

⁷⁴ (II.I.7).

⁷⁵ (II.I.5).

⁷⁶ (II.I.11).

holy womb.⁷⁷ The consequences of original sin, however, do not stop with the body; depravity plagues every fiber of one's being, including one's values, goals, and judgments. Wretchedness is psychological, in addition to physical, driving us to give into sinful qualities, such as vanity, pride, ambition, and unbelief.⁷⁸ It is not a coincidence that the qualities that characterize our current nature were those that led to Adam and Eve's dire folly in Eden; the wretched actions of Adam and Eve became the wretchedness we internalize and exude today.⁷⁹ The connection, however, also comes with a divide: surely Adam and Eve's depraved behavior before the fall would be related to our punishment as a result of their sin, but there is still a distinction between the nature of pre and postlapsarian human beings. While Adam *gained* his depravity via external evils, our depravity is implicit.

The notion of character virtues being either habituated or experiential was formally articulated by Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the ancient philosopher explains that no virtues of character are innate, but must be acquired: "just as we acquire crafts, by having first activated them."⁸⁰ The method of acquisition, however, varies among the virtues: "Virtue, then is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching... Virtue of character [i.e., of *ethos*] results from habit [*ethos*]."⁸¹ When applying these premises to Calvin's idea of human nature *from nature* versus *naturally*, the distinction between what we are able to habituate and what we are able to acquire through learning is not quite clear. Unlike Calvin, Aristotle does not hold the belief that virtues are either natural or unnatural to us.⁸² Instead, the philosopher suggests that every aspect of our selves is acquired one

⁷⁷ (II.II.8).

⁷⁸ (II.I.2).

⁷⁹ (II.I.2).

⁸⁰ "Book II: Virtue of Character." *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle, 2nd ed., Hackett Publishing Company, 1999, pp. 18–19.

⁸¹ Aristotle 18.

⁸² Aristotle 18.

way or another.⁸³ That being said, virtues that are properly habituated *become* inherent to our being: “we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”⁸⁴ In Calvin’s theology, we were created good by God, but still did bad things in Eden. Aristotle would interpret this to mean that our morals were not yet properly habituated, and our reasoning not yet sound, due to a lack of experience. After the fall, however, Aristotelian concepts of habituation versus experience-based learning become convoluted. The following section will explain just how complicated human depravity is once human nature is completely turned on its head.

When Calvin speaks of human nature before the fall, no indications of depravity can be spotted:

“though I retain the principle...that the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals. Accordingly, by this term is denoted the integrity with which Adam was endued when his intellect was clear, his affections subordinated to reason, all his senses duly regulated, and when he truly ascribed all his excellence to the admirable gifts of his Maker.”⁸⁵

Calvin describes Adam as good *from nature*, which is inconsistent with Aristotle’s theory on moral habituation. His attempt to Christianize Aristotle’s ethical framework poses several more problems for the theologian, especially since Calvin’s qualifications of *natural* moral and intellectual character assume that our virtues are born with us. The theologian views original sin as a transition of human *nature*, rather than human virtue. Calvin juxtaposes Adam’s pre and post fallen nature in order to emphasize the degradation of human character that ensued: “as the image of God constitutes the entire excellence of human nature, as it shone in Adam before his

⁸³ Aristotle 18.

⁸⁴ Aristotle 19.

⁸⁵ (I.XV.3).

fall, but was afterwards vitiated and almost destroyed, nothing remaining but a ruin, confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity.”⁸⁶ Attempting to equate the downward trajectory of Adam’s character to Aristotle’s notion of habituation—or lack thereof—, Calvin holds that the depravity that led us to sin has become ‘habituated’ to a point in which it is the only nature we know. Therefore, postlapsarian humans are born wretched and are unable to change their depraved character, just as, according to Aristotle, “a stone, by nature moves downwards, and habituation could not make it move upwards, not even if you threw it up ten thousand times to habituate it.”⁸⁷ And while Calvin believes that our inherent nature cannot be changed without Divine intervention, pious actions can save us from sinking deeper into our depravity. This is where Aristotle’s virtue of thought comes into play; while our moral character has been ‘habituated’ to fail us, our reason has remained intact. Calvin’s views on human free will after the fall are thus revealed: “man is said to have free will, not because he has a free choice of good and evil, but because he acts voluntarily, and not by compulsion.”⁸⁸ In short, Calvin assumes that in addition to our inherent goodness, we possessed unrestricted free will in Eden.⁸⁹ When we fell from grace, however, we also sacrificed the part of our will that can monitor good from evil.⁹⁰ Therefore, the wretchedness that we, in our postlapsarian state, possess inhibits us from moral progress, but not necessarily from rational decision-making. According to Aristotle, this intellectual freedom is reflective of thought virtue, which exclusively relies on experience, trial and error, and time to develop properly. This does not mean that our depravity leaves our ability to reason unscathed—just the opposite. Calvin states: “that man is not forced to be the servant of

⁸⁶ (I.XV.4).

⁸⁷ Aristotle 18.

⁸⁸ (II.II.7).

⁸⁹ (II.II.8).

⁹⁰ (II.II.8).

sin, while he is however, (a voluntary slave); his will being bound by the fetters of sin.”⁹¹

Wretchedness permeates one’s ability to will well, but one’s fight against his/her *natural* inclination to sin is what makes us righteous.⁹² It is at this point that our discussion turns from direct consequences of original sin to efforts to better ourselves, given the limited free will we have.

Grace

For Calvin, grace is the mercy that God offers to His children.⁹³ While there is no way for mortal beings to obtain the grace of God without Divine interference, Calvin explains how faith is the “illumination of God, which distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked.”⁹⁴ Faith, as presented in the *Institutes* consists of many working parts. To start, it involves repentance: “it is certain that no man can embrace the grace of the Gospel without betaking himself from the errors of his former life into the right path and making it his whole study to practise repentance.”⁹⁵ To be clear, repentance is not a means to an end—one should not repent to gain a promise of salvation.⁹⁶ No, repentance, comprising of “mortification and quickening,” should be: “A real conversion of our life unto God, proceeding from sincere and serious fear of God; and consisting in the mortification of our flesh...and the quickening of the Spirit.”⁹⁷ Calvin briefly elaborates on ‘mortification’ and ‘quickenings,’ describing mortification as intense feelings of grief and terror in response to one’s sin, and quickening as the comfort that faith provides, once sin is consciously processed and is overtaken by overwhelming fear and love of the Divine.⁹⁸

This process, however, incorporates “a transformation not only in external works, but in the soul

⁹¹ (II.II.7).

⁹² (II.II.8).

⁹³ (III.XXIV.17).

⁹⁴ (III.XXIV.17).

⁹⁵ (III.III.1).

⁹⁶ (III.III.2).

⁹⁷ (III.III.5).

⁹⁸ (III.III.3).

itself, which is able only after it has put off its old habits to bring forth fruits conformable to its renovation.”⁹⁹ Thus, we return to Aristotle, in order to flesh out the ‘old habits’ that Calvin speaks of. As previously stated, Aristotle does not believe that humans are born with developed habits and intellect, but that we attain these virtues via practice and exposure to the outside world.¹⁰⁰ What Calvin seems to be saying is quite the contrary. The ‘natural viciousness’ that Calvin explicitly claims does *not* stem from ‘depraved habit,’ but instead from ‘hereditary law,’¹⁰¹ is now referred to as ‘old habits’ by Calvin, himself!¹⁰² What’s more perplexing is the fact that such ‘habits’ cannot be unhabituated, since Calvin asserts wretchedness to be our *new nature*.¹⁰³ Therefore, this makes the process of obtaining God’s grace impossible for the practitioner to execute. This, however, is exactly what Calvin wants. Roland Boer explains: “Calvin glimpses the radical possibilities of grace only to try and contain it. A little more fully, the militant revolutionary potential for grace shows up in a direct ratio with depravity.” Calvin, himself, reveals this illogical, seemingly evil tactic by urging the practitioner to fear God. In his explanation of mortification and quickening as essential to proper repentance, Calvin portrays a terrifying image of God: “Before the mind of the sinner can be inclined to repentance, he must be aroused by the thought of divine judgment... [his sins] will not allow him to rest, or have one moment’s peace, but will perpetually urge him to adopt a different plan of life, that he may be able to stand securely at the judgment-seat.”¹⁰⁴ Calvin does not regard fear in God as psychologically harmful to the practitioner, but instead a potential catalyst in changing one’s way of life for the better. However, if one simply *cannot* change their life for the better—seeing as

⁹⁹ (III.III.6).

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle 18.

¹⁰¹ (II.I.11).

¹⁰² (III.III.6).

¹⁰³ (II.I.1).

¹⁰⁴ (III.III.7).

they are inherently depraved—he/she is simply stuck in a torturous cycle of attempting to better him/her self, not being able to, therefore never reaping the benefits of fearing the Lord as well as not obtaining God’s grace via proper repentance, and thus faith. However, recall what I said at the beginning of this paragraph: “there is no way for mortal beings to obtain the grace of God without Divine interference;” not only is Calvin setting us up for failure with false hopes of self-improvement, but he, himself, seems to forget that God’s grace is only God’s to hand out. Calvin admits: “it may be proper to consider what the remedy is which divine grace provides for the correction and cure of natural corruption,” swiftly adding, “Since the Lord...supplies us with what is lacking.”¹⁰⁵ He supplies *us* with what is lacking, meaning that any attempt to rid of ‘old habits’ on *our* end is completely useless. Instead, we have to wait until *God* provides us with what Calvin would call a *new nature*. At this point, Aristotle’s ethics have no application to Calvin’s warped idea of human nature.

Predestination

Predestination, or divine election, is the notion that, “plainly owing to the mere pleasure of God...salvation is spontaneously offered to some, while others have no access to it.”¹⁰⁶

Calvin’s doctrine of predestination cannot stand without God’s grace, since grace is the sole predictor of one’s salvation, rather than damnation.¹⁰⁷ And because grace is divvied out by God and God alone, one’s predestined fate is just that—predestined, and thus immutable.¹⁰⁸ Naturally, this presents some conflicts, of which Calvin is not unaware.¹⁰⁹ He knows that for some of us, curiosity will take over, and we will foolishly attempt to know the inner workings of God:

¹⁰⁵ (II.III.6).

¹⁰⁶ (III.XXI.1).

¹⁰⁷ (III.XXI.1).

¹⁰⁸ (III.XXI.5).

¹⁰⁹ (III.XXI.1).

“The subject of predestination, which in itself is attended with considerable difficulty, is rendered very perplexed, and hence perilous by human curiosity, which cannot be restrained from wandering into forbidden paths, and climbing to the clouds, determined if it can that none of the secret things of God shall remain unexplored.”¹¹⁰ That being said, he is vehemently against this foolish venture, essentially stating that what’s done is done: “When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present...he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection.”¹¹¹ Therefore, we can conclude that not only is our fate in the afterlife predetermined by God, but so are our daily actions and behavior. Predestination thus places the notion of original sin in an interesting position, which is to be explored in our in-depth analysis of Genesis in chapter 2. However, for the time being, we will focus on predestination as it concerns our depraved livelihood after the fall.

When speaking of divine election, Calvin refers to the “light” he receives from God, both illuminating his path to doctrinal dissemination as well as signaling his salvation post mortem.¹¹² While there is not enough evidence in Calvin’s writings to conclude that all those predestined to salvation see such a “light,” it is implied that one does receive some indication that he is favored under God: “But when once the light of Divine Providence has illuminated the believer’s soul, he is relieved and set free, not only from extreme fear and anxiety which formerly oppressed him, but from all care.”¹¹³ Calvin’s emphasis on ‘fear’ and ‘anxiety’ relief suggests that those who are assigned to salvation do not carry the same burden of Adam’s sin as the rest of us. Calvin openly confesses: “All are not created on equal terms, but some are

¹¹⁰ (III.XXI.1).

¹¹¹ (III.XXI.5).

¹¹² (I.XVII.11).

¹¹³ (I.XVII.11).

preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, an extreme contradiction appears in Calvin’s theological edifice: we are all equally wretched, yet we are also not created equal, for God loves some of us more than others. This is what Boer calls the *aristocracy of salvation*: “The tension goes as follows. Everyone is equally sinful and equally condemned for it. The abolition of any salvation by works closes down any possible claim to merit or privilege. But then Calvin says: you may all be depraved, but that doesn’t mean you will all be saved. In other words, grace is limited.”¹¹⁵ In defense of predestination, Canlis states: “Predestination was a fortress against anxiety and a lasting message of comfort to those who seemed *unelect* by society.”¹¹⁶ Such an assertion, however, ignores the link between Calvin’s predestination and sociopolitical strata, when, in fact, Boer shows how this doctrinal elitism exactly mirrors the natural hierarchy of society, in which “some are blessed more than others with wealth, opportunity, and power.”¹¹⁷ I agree with Boer’s analysis, and find it absurd that Calvin could suggest that depravity is democratic in nature when predestination, which at its core segregates the haves from the have-nots, dictates all that humans do.¹¹⁸ If Calvin were to defend himself, then one of two possible arguments could be posited:

1) While we are all wretched, perhaps some are more wretched—or better at hiding it—than others, therefore dismantling the “democratic” component of our depravity.

Or

2) We *are* all equally wretched, but God’s divine election does not alter one’s level of wretchedness, since wretchedness and grace are two independent variables.

¹¹⁴ (III.XXI.5).

¹¹⁵ Boer 36.

¹¹⁶ Canlis 11.

¹¹⁷ Boer 26.

¹¹⁸ Boer 22.

The former is Boer's stance. Based on Calvin's ideology, I would assume that he believes in the latter view: equal distribution of sin with unrestricted mercy from God. Even so, Calvin himself benefits from Boer's argument. Remember that "light" that Calvin receives from God, enabling him to experience glory and enlightenment?¹¹⁹ Why is Calvin, over others, gifted with God's "light"? His answer exemplifies the classicism that Boer critiques:

"Why then, they ask, should the thief be punished for robbing him whom the Lord chose to chastise with poverty?...I concede that thieves and murderers, and other evil-doers, are instruments of Divine Providence, being employed by the Lord himself to execute the judgments which he has resolved to inflict"¹²⁰ Here, Calvin perceives predestination as method of creating social order; the poor and disadvantaged peoples, more prone to sin than others, will receive God's wrath, while more civilized peoples will bask in God's grace. Therefore, in spite of the theology Calvin hopes to disseminate, it seems as though he advocates for a system in which grace is bestowed on the basis of moral and social hierarchy, making grace undemocratic, limited, and elitist.

For me, the most infuriating aspect of this blaring contradiction loops back to the historical context of Calvin's split from the Roman Catholic Church. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Luther and Calvin's break from the Church was mostly in response to corruption of power and manipulation amongst Catholic clergymen.¹²¹ One way this corruption took form was in indulgences, or the sale of one's entry into Heaven. Although predestination did not come with a price tag, its very structure inherently favored the elite, 'affording' them an afterlife of salvation and glory.¹²² We, then, must ask ourselves: how do we navigate our lives

¹¹⁹ (I.XVII.11).

¹²⁰ (I.XVII.5).

¹²¹ (III.XX.9).

¹²² Boer 36.

when such an uncertain future lay ahead? Should we just give up, since we cannot prove our righteousness to God, nor buy our way into Heaven? Calvin says no, for the limited free will that we have allows us to exercise good faith.¹²³ Furthermore, turning away from God is still divinely controlled, proving that escaping God's clutches is impossible: "We have already been told that hardening is not less under the immediate hand of God than mercy."¹²⁴ While it is true that Calvin's entire edifice presents carelessness and unbelief as viable solutions for a population of depraved beings, I ask you: *is that a life to lead?* While we may not embrace faith for faith's sake alone, we choose it over a life lackluster of meaning. If the promise of God's grace, and thus restoration of unrestricted free will, as Adam had in Eden, doesn't lure you in, then perhaps the promise of purpose will.

The next chapter will delve into a close reading of the biblical story of Genesis, in hopes of offering further insight into Calvin's authoritarian interpretation of original sin and its grim consequences that continue to afflict humankind today.

¹²³ (II.II.8).

¹²⁴ (III.XXIII.1).

Calvin's Genesis

The biblical creation story supports the Augustinian, and thus Calvinist, interpretation of original sin, yet presents inconsistencies from Calvin's edifice, once grace and predestination come into play. This chapter serves to explore our fall from grace and ensuing wretchedness, as presented in Genesis, observing the changes in Adam and Eve's postlapsarian *nature*. Then, we turn to Calvin's analysis of the Divine consequences of original sin, and whether or not human beings can be fully to blame for their descent into depravity. To begin, the themes excavated in the biblical story are: the goodness of God,¹²⁵ human divinity, sin, and human depravity, their order corresponding to the timeline of the fall in Eden. From there, we move onto Calvin's analysis of the human role in our demise, referring to the Scripture to either support or dispute the theologian's conclusions.

We begin our discussion with a thorough Calvinist examination of God's goodness, using the biblical story of Genesis to support his arguments. To start, Calvin saw God's greatness, as well as the greatness reflected in His creations, to be irrefutable: "His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse."¹²⁶ The creation story mirrors such beliefs, emphasizing the good nature of God's work via the repetition of the following phrase: "And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:10) throughout the first biblical chapter. In the Bible and *Institutes*, the creation of the world embodies God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Calvin regards God's universe as having an "admirable arrangement," and a sacred nature beyond our mortal comprehension: "how few of us are there who, in lifting our eyes to the heavens, or looking

¹²⁵ note the focus on God rather than Jesus in this context

¹²⁶ (I.V.1).

abroad on the various regions of the earth, ever think of the Creator? Do we not rather overlook Him, and sluggishly content ourselves with a view of his works?”¹²⁷ Divine manifestation through the elements of the universe is demonstrated in the biblical story: “And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters” (Gen 1:2). Of course, we cannot ignore our own part in the creation story: “And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). Employing his goodness and grace, God created us, becoming a Father to us, His offspring: “No one, indeed, will voluntarily and willingly devote himself to the service of God unless he has previously tasted his paternal love, and been thereby allured to love and reverence Him.”¹²⁸ This fatherly role of God becomes integral to Calvin’s theology: “Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain in particular a twofold benefit: first, being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes, instead of a judge, an indulgent Father; and, secondly, being sanctified by his Spirit, we aspire to integrity and purity of life.”¹²⁹ We owe our very existence to God, and thus should revere Him as a paternal entity. And, as a father does, He created us “to endue [us] with reason and intelligence, in order that we might cultivate a holy and honourable life, and regard a blessed immortality as our destined aim.”¹³⁰ Calvin explains the gifts that God has bestowed onto us, which serve to provide for us and keep us from going astray. When Adam and Eve leave the path of righteousness and good faith, God still provides for His children: “And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife, garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). However, Calvin warns that God’s protective behavior does not always garner a

¹²⁷ (I.V.11).

¹²⁸ (I.V.3).

¹²⁹ (III.XI.1).

¹³⁰ (II.I.1).

positive outcome for humankind. The theologian prefaces his analysis of Adam's fall with the following statement: "As the act which God punished so severely must have been not a trivial fault but a heinous crime, it will be necessary to attend to the peculiar nature of the sin which produced Adam's fall, and provoked God to inflict such fearful vengeance on the whole human race."¹³¹ While God's actions were harsh, Calvin justifies them as necessary in order to keep us from further destruction and calamity: "Had God not so spared us, our revolt would have carried along with it the entire destruction of nature."¹³² Therefore, everything that God has done has been in the best interest of humankind, from breathing His holy breath of life into our lungs to exiling us from Paradise (Gen 3:23-24).

Humans, unlike other Godly creations, were created in His image, lending us a pseudo-divine status in the universe. The Bible says: "And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27), setting us apart from the rest of creation. Calvin believes that our "heavenly grace"¹³³ grants us dominion over all other creatures and elements of the universe: "the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals."¹³⁴ This is supported in the Scripture:

"And God blessed [humankind], saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth. And God said: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat: And to all the

¹³¹ (II.I.4).

¹³² (II.II.17).

¹³³ (I.V.3).

¹³⁴ (I.XV.3).

beasts of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to all that move upon the earth, and wherein there is life, that they may have to feed upon. And it was so done” (Gen 1:28-30).

Calvin explains, however, that human power is not the sole indicator of our Divine imprint: “it cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the image is in the soul.”¹³⁵ I reintroduce the biblical quote I cited above: “And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul,” suggesting that God transmitted His divine attributes through the soul, rather than the body. Calvin asserts that the divinity of Adam’s soul is the reason why Christ was capable of embodying righteousness, even after the consequences of original sin effaced the body: “our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ, who is, therefore, called the second Adam, because he restores us to true and substantial integrity...Christ, with the living soul which Adam was created (1. Cor. xv. 45), commends the richer measure of grace bestowed in regeneration.”¹³⁶ Thus, humans, despite our eventual downfall, undoubtedly possess divine qualities.

Original sin marks a major turning point in the Bible, consistent with Calvin’s views on the detriment of sin, and thus human depravity. In the Bible, the fall begins with the deception of Eve. During Eve’s encounter with the cunning serpent, the creature assures her:

“No, you shall not die the death. For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4-5). Thus, Eve’s blind trust in the snake’s word and subsequent eager ingestion of the forbidden fruit insinuates that she had personal motivations to self-improve, seeing as she suddenly found the tree to be “good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold” (Gen 3:6). The sin, however, does not stop there: “and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her

¹³⁵ (I.XV.3).

¹³⁶ (I.XV.4).

husband who did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons” (Gen 3:6-7). To Calvin, Eve’s decision to listen to the serpent’s word over God’s demonstrates disobedience, while Adam’s willingness to follow suit with his companion’s sin represents the fatal flaw of pride.¹³⁷ When attempting to explore the reasons behind their grave sin, Calvin states: “The common idea of sensual intemperance is childish. The sum and substance of all virtues could not consist in abstinence from a single fruit amid a general abundance of every delicacy that could be desired.”¹³⁸ Aristotle uses incontinence as a means to define intemperance: “For the simply incontinent person is not incontinent about everything, but he has the same range as the intemperate person. Nor is he incontinent simply by being inclined towards these things—that would make incontinence the same as intemperance. Rather, he is incontinent by being inclined toward them in this way. For the intemperate person acts on decision when he is led on, since he thinks it is right in every case to pursue the pleasant thing at hand; the incontinent person, however, thinks it wrong to pursue this pleasant thing, yet still pursues it.”¹³⁹

Given Adam and Eve’s goodness *from* nature, incontinence cannot be a valid explanation, and intemperance simply does not make sense, given the logic Calvin offers above. He ponders other possibilities, offering Augustine’s proposition of concupiscence as a viable option: “Those who term [original sin] as *concupiscence* use a word not very inappropriate, provided it were added that everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, is defiled and pervaded with this concupiscence...the whole man is in himself nothing else than

¹³⁷ (II.I.4).

¹³⁸ (II.I.4).

¹³⁹ “Book VII: Incontinence.” *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle, 2nd ed., Hackett Publishing Company, 1999, pp. 102.

concupiscence.”¹⁴⁰ However, Calvin requires a more convincing explanation for Adam’s fatal disobedience: the argument for infidelity. Calvin’s position entails the following: Adam was aware of both the repercussions of eating from the tree of knowledge, as well as the benefits of abstaining from ingesting the forbidden fruit.¹⁴¹ Given the free will of morality and reason that Adam and Eve possessed in Eden, they cannot use the defense that their *nature* compelled them to sin, but instead are caught red-handed as willing infidels. Calvin proposes: “In fine, infidelity opened the door to ambition, and ambition was the parent of rebellion, man casting off the fear of God, and giving free vent to his lust.”¹⁴² Calvin’s claims of infidelity assume that original sin was a product of the evil inner workings of humans, and humans alone: “The blame of our ruin rests with our own carnality, not with God, its only cause being our degeneracy from our original condition.”¹⁴³ The creation story maintains God’s innocence, for God is absent at the time of Adam and Eve’s rebellion: “And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of paradise. And the Lord God called Adam, and said to him: Where art thou?” (Gen 3:8-9). Therefore, our despondency was of our own doing, and God’s punishment of us was just and appropriate: “The promise, which gave [Adam] hope of eternal life as long as he should eat of the tree of life...were meant to prove and exercise his faith. Hence it is not difficult to infer in what way Adam provoked the wrath of God.”¹⁴⁴ His wrath was ignited upon the couple’s attempt to conceal their naked bodies, revealing their newly-obtained knowledge gained from the forbidden fruit: “And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband who

¹⁴⁰ (II.I.8).

¹⁴¹ (II.I.4).

¹⁴² (II.I.4).

¹⁴³ (II.I.10).

¹⁴⁴ (II.I.4).

did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons” (Gen 3:6-7). When Calvin speaks of self-knowledge, he asserts: “When we say that man should see nothing in himself which can raise his spirits, our meaning is, that he possesses nothing on which he can proudly plume himself.”¹⁴⁵ Rest assured, Adam and Eve found no confidence or pride in their self-discovery, but shame (Gen 3:7-10). Hiding their nakedness from God, the pair shamefully admitted to their sins:

“And he said to him: And who hath told thee that thou wast naked, but that thou hast eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat? And Adam said: The woman, whom thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said to the woman: Why hast thou done this? And she answered: The serpent deceived me, and I did eat” (Gen 3:11-13).

Thus the body becomes a shamed object, and one that transmits evil, just as Adam’s seed infects the human gene pool: “the whole man, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, is so deluged, as it were, that no part remains exempt from sin, and therefore, everything which proceeds from him is imputed as sin.”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Eve’s punishment of painful childbirth (Gen 3:16) mirrors Calvin’s evaluation of the mother’s womb as a holding cell for sinful reproduction: “even infants bringing their condemnation with them from their mother’s womb, suffer...for their own defect. For although they have not yet produced the fruits of their own righteousness, they have the seed implanted in them.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ (II.I.3).

¹⁴⁶ (II.I.9).

¹⁴⁷ (II.I.8).

It is at this point that we adapt a *new nature*, completely corrupted by incontinence, knowing evil when we see it, and pursuing it anyway.¹⁴⁸ However, if incontinence only applies after the fall and Calvin rejects intemperance as a possible explanation for their sin, how and why do Adam and Eve eat from the forbidden tree of knowledge? Although Calvin's belief in human wretchedness falls in line with the biblical text, human autonomy over their sinful actions come into question upon a closer examination of his *Institutes*.

Including Calvin's doctrines of grace and predestination, Adam and Eve's fall begins to look a bit more complicated than previously implied. As previously stated, Calvin strongly holds the belief that humans are responsible for our own depravity, adding: "This objection...relates to the mystery of predestination, which will afterwards be considered in its own place."¹⁴⁹ What ever could Calvin mean? Surprisingly, he means that divine election had a significant place in orchestrating original sin: "The decree, I admit, is dreadful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before he made him, and foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree."¹⁵⁰ While Calvin presents this argument as a means to maintain God's innocence, since he "foreknew what the end of man was before he made him,"¹⁵¹ one would be foolish to blindly accept Calvin's argument after so much of his *Institutes* solely pins the fall of humankind on us. However, Calvin persists: "The reprobate would excuse their sins by alleging that they are unable to escape the necessity of sinning, especially because a necessity of this nature is laid upon them by the ordination of God," which he claims to be "consistent with equity,—an equity, indeed, unknown to us, but most certain."¹⁵² How could Calvin claim God's grace to be certain, when the very doctrine of predestination rests upon it being both limited and

¹⁴⁸ (II.I.10).

¹⁴⁹ (II.I.10).

¹⁵⁰ (III.XXIII.7).

¹⁵¹ (III.XXIII.7).

¹⁵² (III.XXIII.9).

completely out of our control? Calvin haphazardly contends: “it is false and most wicked to charge God with dispensing justice unequally, because in this predestination he does not observe the same course towards all,”¹⁵³ essentially contradicting himself. Calvin’s illogical, convoluted arguments threaten the integrity of the biblical creation story, which explicitly states that God was absent from the scene of the crime, and that Adam and Eve sinned on their own volition (Gen 3:7-9). Absent or not, Calvin regards God’s “blessings” as an inadequate defense against “the primary and universal curse of the whole race from previously taking effect,” putting God’s omnipotence into question.¹⁵⁴ Contributing to the collapse of his edifice, Calvin asserts: “Guilt is from nature, whereas sanctification is from supernatural grace.”¹⁵⁵ This sentence could not be more incoherent with his previous premises. In the above *from nature/natural* analysis as well as in the Bible, we learned that humans were created good. In the creation story, prelapsarian Adam and Eve were both “naked: to wit,” yet “were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). There was no semblance of guilt in their hearts, but unadulterated purity and naivety. Thus, guilt, often morphing into shame, is the ultimate loose end in Calvin’s theology. Why do Adam and Eve internalize shame as an immediate consequence of original sin? What does their ‘naked’ shame tell us about Calvin’s Christianity? It appears as though he views shame as imperative to true piety: “he who is most deeply abased and alarmed, by the consciousness of his disgrace, nakedness, want, and misery, has made the greatest progress in the knowledge of himself.”¹⁵⁶ The next chapter will further uncover Godly devotion as contingent upon experienced shame, utilizing Stephanie Arel’s Affect Theory for textual support.

¹⁵³ (III.XXIII.11).

¹⁵⁴ (II.I.7).

¹⁵⁵ (II.I.7).

¹⁵⁶ (II.II.10).

The Examination of Calvin's Shame using Affect Theory:

To evaluate the psychological underpinnings of Calvin's emphasis on shame as a catalyst to spiritual elevation, I am consulting Stephanie Arel's book, *Affect Theory, Shame, and Christian Formation*. Affect Theory "represents an attempt to account for the ways in which individuals come to know the world, theorizing not only the body but also its capacity to act and be acted upon."¹⁵⁷ Affect theorists believe that social influences are felt and processed bodily, unifying the mind-body connection and thus resisting their dichotomization. Applicable in both psychological and philosophical realms, Affect Theory approaches "crisis, suffering, trauma, and violence using more than the lens of Freudian analysis and Freud's theory of drive mechanisms."¹⁵⁸ This theory treats inter and intrahuman experiences and our psychological and behavioral responses to said experiences.¹⁵⁹ Not only does Affect Theory reject a body-mind duality, but it refutes the idea that the self and his/her respective environment are separate.¹⁶⁰ This drives the physical and emotional worlds together, muddying the boundaries between social and biological realms.¹⁶¹ Shame, as analyzed via the Affect Theory, is often compiled with other affects, such as guilt, which only does a disservice to shame in all of its nuances.¹⁶² In order to understand shame affectively, we have to accept Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, which states that our own actions are dictated by our social and environmental conditions.¹⁶³ We are basically a springboard for societal norms and beliefs, and therefore, none of our behaviors can be entirely our own.¹⁶⁴ Circling back to Aristotle, Arel asserts that *habitus* is an acquired phenomenon: "social situations and environments (familial, educational, theological) inscribe

¹⁵⁷ Arel 8.

¹⁵⁸ Arel 25.

¹⁵⁹ Arel 25-26.

¹⁶⁰ Arel 26.

¹⁶¹ Arel 26.

¹⁶² Arel 34.

¹⁶³ Arel 50.

¹⁶⁴ Arel 50.

habitus on the body, shaping bodies, and enacting what Bourdieu calls a form of ‘symbolic violence.’”¹⁶⁵ Ignoring the latter part of that quotation for the time being, Bourdieu argues, like Aristotle, that *habitus*, which is a product of the psychological phenomenon of social desirability, is not inherent to the self. To distinguish between *habitus* and its several manifestations, Arel offers the following: “Culturally, theologically, and socially, shame is inscribed on the body as *habitus*; it is not only an indelible mark, but once the mark is made, shame is lived unto, perpetuated, and interred.”¹⁶⁶ In brief, *habitus* expresses the processes by which affects, such as shame are formed: “As a *habitus*, shame constitutes an internal state formed by the external environment the interchange through which shapes and is always shaping bodies.”¹⁶⁷

Now that shame has been defined as an affect, constituting external and internal properties, we move onto its origins within the Christian context. Original sin, along with its consequences, has birthed a subcategory of Christian shame that persists to this day. Stephanie Arel uncovers the connection between shame as seen in both the theological and the psychological realms. She traces theological shame back to Christian Antiquity with Augustine’s founding of the concept of original sin, as it is perceived today: “His idea of congenital sinfulness has become normative for the Catholic and Protestant theologies... In this view, at the center of a corrupt natural order, which erupts from the order of paradise after the fall, lies a helpless, sinful, and shamed humanity disconnected from God.”¹⁶⁸ Arel suggests that this Augustinian doctrine, later to be adapted by Calvin and several others, birthed the concept of religious shame within the Christian context. While Calvin rarely names shame explicitly, he frequently speaks of wretchedness, which undoubtedly generates shame. Evidence of this can be

¹⁶⁵ Arel 50.

¹⁶⁶ Arel 50.

¹⁶⁷ Arel 50.

¹⁶⁸ Arel 5.

seen in his discussion of original sin: “it is impossible to think of our primeval divinity without being immediately reminded of the sad spectacle of our ignominy and corruption, ever since we fell from our original sin in the person of our first parent. In this way, we feel dissatisfied with ourselves, and become truly humble.”¹⁶⁹ If this couldn’t be more explicit, Calvin makes a point to reject the concepts of self love and forgiveness: “Owing to the innate self-love by which we are blinded, we most willingly persuade ourselves that we do not possess a single quality which is deserving of hatred...[this] foolish idea, that man is perfectly sufficient of himself for all the purposes of a good and happy life.”¹⁷⁰ Is Calvin urging us to punish ourselves, without respite, until the day we die? It appears so: “there could be no condemnation without guilt,”¹⁷¹ implying that our wretchedness should be processed via guilt, or shame if guilt becomes chronic and untreated. In essence, Calvin sets the stage as follows: wretchedness is our *designation*; shame is our *experience*. This shame is multifaceted—it is paradoxical to guilt, yet almost always conflated with it. It is harmful to the self if in excess, but is beneficial with regard to maintaining one’s humility and desire to improve the self. Arel divides shame, alongside its cause and effect, into three categories: unstable attachments to the other, the biological response, and concealment.

We begin with a discussion on unstable connections. Arel begins this discussion at infancy: “Attachment constitutes the instinctual and reflexive behavior of the infant to connect to the caregiver.”¹⁷² In the case of a typically developing relationship between parent and child, “attachment manifests in the experience of the shame affect through interest-excitement. The infant cannot experience shame without the presence of interest-excitement and the instinctual

¹⁶⁹ (II.I.1).

¹⁷⁰ (II.I.2).

¹⁷¹ (II.II.8).

¹⁷² Arel 39.

urge to connect.”¹⁷³ Thus, we can extrapolate that a broken attachment will elicit shame, but will *not* discontinue one’s instinct to remain attached to said person/thing, since the former (shame) cannot exist without the latter (attachment).¹⁷⁴ When fragmented relationships develop, we tend to avoid social connection at all costs. This is due to the fear of rejection, which can trigger more shameful responses within the self. However, unstable attachment to the other is especially detrimental in that it inhibits one’s ability to regulate shame.¹⁷⁵ In order for such regulation to take place, the ashamed needs to feel safe and supported in the relationship, or seek what is known as secure attachment.¹⁷⁶ Not only does shame present challenges for the shamed person of interest in connecting with others, but it also proves difficult for the other in connecting with the shamed.¹⁷⁷ This is mostly due to a lack of empathy on behalf of the individual experiencing shame: “Shame inhibits empathy and empathetic connection because the inferior self does not feel worthy of connection with the other.”¹⁷⁸ If one cannot receive empathy, he/she cannot give it away. Arel exemplifies this as proof of distinction between guilt and shame: “in guilt, no low sense of self-worth inhibits connection to others. In fact, whereas shame impairs empathy and negatively influences social skills, guilt facilitates empathetic responses.”¹⁷⁹ Since shame influences attachment to the other so much, we have to tackle the root of our shame, in order to be capable of accepting the other, and therefore, one’s own self.

Within the context of the creation story, God was Adam and Eve’s caregiver, establishing a stable attachment to them. By this, I mean that God first made certain that His new world was suitable for human life, and *then* created them and looked after them: “And the Lord God had

¹⁷³ Arel 39.

¹⁷⁴ Arel 40.

¹⁷⁵ Arel 41.

¹⁷⁶ Arel 41.

¹⁷⁷ Arel 42.

¹⁷⁸ Arel 42.

¹⁷⁹ Arel 42-43.

planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning: wherein he placed man whom he had formed. And the Lord God brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of: the tree of life also in the midst of paradise: and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:8-9). Both Adam and Eve had direct contact with God, as well as with each other. After the fall, however, Calvin argues that this relationship between God and humans was severed. From the biblical text, it is implied that the connection between Adam and Eve is also strained: Adam blames Eve for tempting him into sin, and Eve becomes subservient under Adam’s authority as a result of God’s punishment (Gen 3:12,16). This speculation is further strengthened by Arel’s earlier point pertaining to the inability for a shamed individual to connect to the other—imagine the challenge of attempting to connect two ashamed individuals at the same time! For Calvin, this detachment from God has been both the single greatest loss and greatest gift to humankind. Naturally, Calvin first and foremost sees this strained relationship as an irreparable tragedy, for which we are responsible. Reintroducing the quote above, we can so clearly detect Calvin’s pain and lamentation: “it is impossible to think of our primeval dignity without being immediately reminded of the sad spectacle of our ignominy and corruption, ever since we fell from our original in the person of our first parent. In this way, we feel dissatisfied with ourselves, and become truly humble, while we are inflamed with new desires to seek after God.”¹⁸⁰ In this instance, our wretchedness fostered our “ignominy and corruption,” separating us from the Divine, but our dissatisfaction with ourselves is shame. We become ashamed upon the realization that we were responsible for tarnishing this holy connection, and, according to Calvin, such a realization brings us closer to the Divine: “For as there exists in man something like a world of misery, and ever since we were stript of the divine attire our naked shame discloses an immense series of disgraceful properties, every man, being stung by the

¹⁸⁰ (II.I.1).

consciousness of his own unhappiness, in this way necessarily obtains at least some knowledge of God.”¹⁸¹ In this way, the fall has served as a lesson to us: the more we acknowledge the role we played in our despondency, the closer we are to repossessing God’s Edenic grace. Yet, Arel reminds us that it is this shame that enables unstable attachment and stifles healthy relationships from developing. The vicious cycle continues in this manner, and, according to Arel, can only be remedied in confronting and beginning to heal one’s shame. Interestingly enough, Arel finds encouragement in Augustine’s work to rebuild insecure attachments: “Augustine’s rhetoric constructs a Christian self in ways that are useful for showing how shame becomes interred and subsequently how it becomes repaired through empathy and secure attachments.”¹⁸² Evidence of beneficial implementations of shame can also be seen in Calvin’s *Institutes*.

Calvin opens the first chapter of his first book with the following declaration: “But through the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie, due arrangement requires that we treat of the former in the first place, and then descend to the latter.”¹⁸³ In doing so, he sets the tone for the rest of the text, being that depravity has separated us from God, but without God, we can’t know our own selves. This theme weaves its way into every book and chapter of Calvin’s *Institutes*, reminding us that despite the disconnection that occurred during the fall, one must work to repair this connection with God in order to repair his/her self. This reparation, as one would imagine, involves deep personal introspection: “It was not without reason that the ancient proverb so strongly recommended to man the knowledge of himself. For it is deemed disgraceful to be ignorant of things pertaining to the business of life, much more disgraceful is self-ignorance, in consequence of which we miserably

¹⁸¹ (I.I.1).

¹⁸² Arel 6.

¹⁸³ (I.I.3.).

deceive ourselves in matters of the highest moment, and so walk blindfold.”¹⁸⁴ As the above quotation suggests, shame can keep us from self-deception, by holding us accountable for our actions. Thus, the “knowledge” that Calvin speaks of here is in direct contrast to the knowledge obtained by Adam and Eve in Eden; this knowledge is accepting one’s wretchedness and feeling one’s shame, in order to pay our debts to God and remain on the path of righteousness.

Therefore, Calvin perceives shame as an indication of spiritual growth and self-betterment. Even so, empathy must play a role in the reformation of broken attachments, as Arel explained. Not only is empathy not included in Calvin’s theological edifice, but it fundamentally contradicts his theological anthropology. Calvin holds the belief that our depravity makes us undeserving of empathy, for empathy would relieve us of some of the Edenic burden we inherited, pardoning ourselves without God’s say. Calvin understands that we would “rather ponder on our good qualities than to contemplate what must overwhelm us with shame—our miserable destitution and ignominy. There is nothing more acceptable to the human mind than flattery.”¹⁸⁵ To Calvin, living in this state of blissful ignorance is counterproductive to one’s knowledge of the self, and thus knowledge of and attachment to God.¹⁸⁶ So, how does Arel suggest we repair the mortal-immortal relationship in the absence of human empathy, in order to attenuate harmful shame, while upholding the religious shame that inspires us to fight against our depravity, as Augustine and Calvin would suggest? She doesn’t, because we can’t. “Nurturing and non-judgmental touch stimulates the interest that shame truncates, rendering the body both present and vulnerable or exposed...touch of this sort validates, affirms, and acknowledges the self, constituting being.”¹⁸⁷ Arel’s entire theory relies on the acceptance of oneself enough to address the etiology of their

¹⁸⁴ (II.I.1).

¹⁸⁵ (II.I.2).

¹⁸⁶ (II.I.2).

¹⁸⁷ Arel 138.

shame. Such acceptance cannot occur without empathy towards the self or the other, which cannot take place in Calvin's theology because a) only God can grant us forgiveness and b) we cannot know ourselves before first knowing the Other, being God. In terms of a solution to the problem of shame, Arel's Affect Theory is incoherent with Calvin's belief in our relationship to God, which is both broken and everlasting. Anyhow, remembering earlier references to grace and salvation, this connection can only be mended if God so chooses to mend it.

Next, we speak of the biology of shame. This section will be broken into two parts: one focusing on the psychophysiological processes that occur in the body when exposed to shame, and the other treating Arel's concept of "shamed bodies."

Biological processes

"Our condition in this world, I confess, involves us in such wretchedness, and we are harassed by such a variety of afflictions, that scarcely a day passes without some trouble or grief. Moreover amid so many uncertain events, we cannot be otherwise than full of daily anxiety and fear. Whithersoever men turn themselves, a labyrinth of evils surrounds them."¹⁸⁸

The above quotation is a translation of Calvin's commentary on Psalm 30. It is evident from his tone that he is emotionally tormented by human depravity, and, naturally, the shame it harbors.

While psychological anguish is clearly a result of excess shame, shame can also affect the physical: "Research has shown that shame increases the stress hormones cortisol and ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone), while inhibiting the health of the immune system through pro-inflammatory cytokine activity."¹⁸⁹ This not only subjects the body to a constant state of stress and fear, which can disrupt one's 'fight or flight' responses, but it can also suppress one's

¹⁸⁸ Canlis 2.

¹⁸⁹ Arel 41.

immune system, making one physically weaker than those who live without shame.¹⁹⁰ According to a study conducted by a group of psychologists at the University of Munich, shameful situations have been found to activate the frontal and temporal areas of the brain, which target social emotion, decision-making, reward/loss neural pathways, and memory, as well as autonomic functions, such as regulation of heart rate and breathing.¹⁹¹ Sparing you from more neurobiological jargon, I will just say the following: shame triggers the parts of the brain responsible for emotional regulation. Therefore, if these areas are hyperactive, emotional outbursts will likely occur.¹⁹² This is not said to insult those living with shame, but instead to warn against the enduring psychophysiological effects of living with constant shame. A mention of violence was made earlier as a reaction to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. Arel describes violent routes that the body and the mind can take if pushed to the boundaries of shame: "According to Gillian, all drives toward self-preservation, including attachment to others, disappear 'when one approaches the point of being so overwhelmed by shame that one can only preserve one's self (as a psychological entity) by sacrificing one's body (or those of others).'"¹⁹³ Gillian addresses self-preservation as a sacrifice of body and reason for the sake of the soul's survival. This can motivate one to direct pent up shame in a violent manner, towards the self and/or the other. As the above studies have shown, this violent reaction to extreme shame is deeply biological:

"Affects, like shame, emerge viscerally as a result of triggers or stimuli, and, at least initially, are

¹⁹⁰ Arel 41.

¹⁹¹ Michl, Petra, et al. "Neurobiological Underpinnings of Shame and Guilt: A Pilot fMRI Study." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 9, no. 2, Feb. 2014, pp. 150–157. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1093/scan/nss114.

¹⁹² Aminoff, Elissa M et al. "The role of the parahippocampal cortex in cognition." *Trends in cognitive sciences* vol. 17,8 (2013): 379-90. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2013.06.009; Yücel, Murat et al. "Anterior cingulate dysfunction: implications for psychiatric disorders?." *Journal of psychiatry & neuroscience : JPN* vol. 28,5 (2003): 350-354.

¹⁹³ Arel 42.

difficult to control. Arising through the body, from beneath consciousness, they grasp the body and demand attention.”¹⁹⁴

With regard to bodily *expression* of shame, Arel emphasizes the role of muscles, nerves, and glands in being particularly reactive to shame. She explains: “The eyes, along with the skin of the face, function as receptor sites for the affect system. As the center of sensory intake, the face, through the ‘transmission and reception through the muscles and receptors’ manifests shame, demonstrating the most intimate sharing of affects.”¹⁹⁵ The face is the body’s most visually expressive attribute, preceding bodily reaction and “evidencing affect’s spontaneity and intractability.”¹⁹⁶ The rapid glandular reactivity of the face can reveal one’s shame to the outside world, which most often takes the form of blushing: “Etymologically, and traditionally, shame associates with such ‘covering,’ and as an affect, it surges through the bodily response of blushing.”¹⁹⁷ Obvious indicators of one’s shame, such as rouging of the face, motivate one to hide away from the outside world. This concept of ‘covering,’ or ‘masking’ one’s shame will be treated in the next section.

Shamed Bodies

To begin, we will start with a definition “shamed bodies,” according to Arel. Essentially, she categorizes shamed bodies as individuals subject to the shameful body-brain feedback loop that reinforces one’s internal shame, either via additional shame or through rage.¹⁹⁸

The shaping of shamed bodies is a direct result of Bourdieu’s *habitus*.¹⁹⁹ While we spoke of biological impulses towards violence in the previous section, we now turn to theological

¹⁹⁴ Arel 26.

¹⁹⁵ Arel 131.

¹⁹⁶ Arel 27.

¹⁹⁷ Arel 109.

¹⁹⁸ Arel 46.

¹⁹⁹ Arel 50.

manifestation of violence. In Marjorie Suchocki's *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*, the notion of violence against nature is presented. In brief, Suchocki argues that sin is an act of violence against creation, and thus also the Creator, because the sin affects God's creation directly, and therefore God indirectly. Since she is also writing within the context of original sin, we can extrapolate violence against creation to mean violence against the other, providing further evidence that shame fuels the doctrine of original sin. And while it is true that Calvin's wretchedness is biological and shame is environmental, shame possesses visceral properties that linger in the body, which is why shame is harder to rid of than guilt: "Of all the affects, Tomkins writes that '[S]hame strikes deepest into the heart of man.' When Tomkins asserts this and later calls shame 'a sickness of the soul,' he locates shame at the core of the self. His psychological assertion about shame's centrality and its capacity to indicate injury of the self can function to inform understandings of the self in theological anthropology."²⁰⁰

According to Calvin's anthropology, wretchedness, and thus shame, lives in every aspect of one's being:

"For as a body, while it contains and fosters the cause and matter of disease, cannot be called healthy, although pain is not actually felt; so a soul, while teeming with such seeds of vice, cannot be called sound. This similitude, however, does not apply throughout. In a body, however morbid, the functions of life are performed; but the soul, when plunged into that deadly abyss, not only labours under vice, but is altogether devoid of good."²⁰¹

These 'vices,' that Calvin says lurk in the body and soul alike, drive us to crime and corruption, which are inherent to our biology post-fall.²⁰² Denial of our wretchedness only fuels violence "to

²⁰⁰ Arel 29.

²⁰¹ (II.III.2).

²⁰² (II.III.2).

restore self-worth, shame's opposite."²⁰³ Therefore, Suchocki and Calvin concur that original sin is an act of violence. For Suchocki, it is a violence against creation, and for Calvin, it is a violence against God and thus the self. In *Institutes*, this reestablishment of self-worth is reflected in Adam's pride and Eve's disobedience.²⁰⁴ He explains how as depraved humans, we are uncomfortable in our depravity and seek any way to reject it.

Although Adam's pride and Eve's disobedience occurred before the fall, and thus before all of humankind was deemed wretched, Calvin views these characteristics as the very factors that led to their downfall. Eve disobeyed God when she ate from the tree of knowledge; Adam exhibited pride when he had faith in his companion that such an act was acceptable over the Divine's word against it. And once the fruit was eaten, what came of the couple? Shame: "And the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons" (Gen 3:7). Suddenly, they became ashamed of their nudity, even though beforehand, "they were both naked: to wit, Adam and his wife: and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). This involves the application of the body-brain feedback loop mentioned before, in which the body signals shameful feelings to the brain and the brain affirms the body's feedback as evidential. What do we make of this assignment of shame to Adam and Eve's naked state? Perhaps the most renowned interpretation of this shift from body neutrality to body sexualization is Augustine's notion of concupiscence.

Concupiscence is strong sexual desire, and Augustine believes that this sexually charged motivation makes up the entirety of our wretchedness.²⁰⁵ Additionally, this wretchedness is passed on via flesh-on-flesh, or procreative sex, both demonizing and scandalizing the bodies even further. Procreation is thus viewed as a necessary evil: it fulfills God's commandments but

²⁰³ Arel 46.

²⁰⁴ (II.I.4).

²⁰⁵ (II.II.8).

also fills the world with more wretchedness. This is mirrored in the creation story, itself: “To the woman also he said: I will multiply thy sorrows, and thy conceptions: in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee” (Gen 3:16). Eve’s punishment is also virtue, seeing as she becomes “the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20), yet even when bringing new life into the world, she experiences great suffering. This is obviously still the case for mothers today, but there are two instances in biblical history in which man was not congenitally depraved: Adam and Jesus Christ.²⁰⁶ Without coincidence, neither of these figures was a product of sexual intercourse, but they were divinely conceived. Therefore, while Calvin stresses that the flesh does not house the entirety of human wretchedness, he, along with Augustine, certainly attributes a great deal of shame to sexualization of the body. Thus, Adam and Eve’s naked innocence transforms into shameful promiscuity, worthy of concealment.

Masked Shame:

As hinted in the above sections treating the social and biological impacts that shame has on an individual, the experience of shame is an unpleasant one that most people try to suppress. This suppression, or what Arel refers to as ‘masked shame,’ is both an instinctual and detrimental response to the human psyche. Like the format of the above section that addressed the biology and anthropology of shame, this analysis of concealed shame will be divided into two parts: the psychological and the theological. Because much of the theological interpretations of ‘masked shame’ are dependent upon the actualization of suppressed shame in real life, we will discuss the psychology behind why we, as humans, hide our shame to begin with.

²⁰⁶ (II.I.6).

The Psychological Reasoning

“Reactions to shame that include hiding can be compared to the behavior of withdrawal, a ‘learned defense against intense and enduring shame affect.’ Like shame, withdrawal happens on a spectrum. Temporarily withdrawing allows for reparation and recovery from shame, but if acknowledging shame fails to occur, withdrawal permits it to be further aggrandized and ultimately interred. . . . Hidden shame grows, while shame exposed diminishes.”²⁰⁷ As briefly mentioned before, guilt and shame are fundamentally different in that the former can become the latter if left untreated, but the latter will manifest into suppression, asocial behaviors, physical harm, and violence.²⁰⁸ While we spoke of violence as an outlet in releasing pent-up shame, there is a far more common phenomenon that is both the cause and effect of crippling shame:

“in shame, the self becomes fragmented as a result of the ontological condition of belief that some part of the self is bad. . . . All of this indicates a much deeper problem than [Reinhold] Niebuhr presents; reduced to a sense of worthlessness the person experiencing shame disintegrates, and the repressed shame morphs into additional shame or violence.”²⁰⁹

How does one go about breaking this shame-repressed shame-violence cycle? Because shame resides within the self, and not from action, remedying shame cannot occur without deep introspection. Unlike guilt, which can be lessened once an individual has identified the wrong action that has provoked the guilty feeling, “a child responds [to shame] even before he/she acquires the ability to reason between right and wrong,”²¹⁰ suggesting that shame is interwoven into our personhood, even if it is not an innate human attribute. How does this psychophysiological treatment of shame play into the tendency to conceal said shame? In our

²⁰⁷ Arel 77-78.

²⁰⁸ Arel 35.

²⁰⁹ Arel 108-109.

²¹⁰ Arel 37.

discussion of the anatomy of shame, blushing was briefly mentioned. Blushing is arguably the easiest way to visually detect the experience of shame in another, and since it is so noticeable, humans do everything we can to conceal it. Thus, we adopt what Arel calls a ‘tragic logic,’ being: “If I disappear, then no one will see me, and my shame will go away.”²¹¹ Unfortunately, this logic is anything but logical. Because shame convinces an individual of their inferiority in the face of others, and empathetic reattachment is essential in reclaiming one’s identity and rejecting their pseudo identity of shame, masking one’s shame in an attempt to rid of it will only foster its metastasis. However, the masking of shame, according to Gilligan, is motivated by self-preservation.²¹² He believes that at the root of this self-preservative response are intense feelings of vulnerability and fear of rejection,²¹³ both of which inhibit daily functioning and risk social humiliation. This is the point in which our discussion shifts from the biological to the anthropological in Augustinian and Calvinist theory.

Masked Shame in Genesis and Institutes

While Arel used different terminology in qualifying what forms the foundation of ‘masked shame,’ fueled by self-preservative tactics, Augustine and Calvin would both agree that at the core of one’s rejection of shame lies the primal sin of pride. Pride, as defined by Calvin, is the value of oneself and one’s abilities before God.²¹⁴ Hubris does not appear to be a consequence of concealing one’s shame at face value. However, it is 1) one’s belief that they have the authority to suppress their shame, not yet excused by the Divine, alongside 2) the rejection of the other, being God, in order to preserve one’s dignity.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Arel 38.

²¹² Arel 42.

²¹³ Arel 42

²¹⁴ (I.III.1).

²¹⁵ Arel 78.

Let us begin by addressing the first of the two prideful responses to the notion of ‘masked shame.’ After Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of knowledge, their nakedness becomes a shameful reality, and they attempt to hide their indecent bodies behind the trees in Eden (Gen 3:8). In this act, they try to emulate the ‘veil of grace,’ as coined by Arel, which once divinely shielded them from experiencing shame from their nakedness before the fall.²¹⁶ As described above, grace is a Godly gift, which means it can only be granted by God on His terms. Thus, any mortal attempt at recreating God’s grace—whether that be in the form of a cloak of ignorance or something else—is not only to degrade God’s power, but to assume that human power is equitable to that of God. Thus, Adam and Eve’s attempt to hide their shame via concealing their bodies behind trees and sewing fig leaves together as make-shift garments may have been a reaction to their humiliation, but these acts were truly a reflection of their desire to retain their dignity before God, despite their grand folly. According to Calvin, the Edenic pair should have ruminated in their discomfort and shame, exhibiting an exorbitant amount of humility, in order to receive God’s mercy: “What remains, therefore, now that man is stript of all his glory, than to acknowledge the God for whose kindness he failed to be grateful, when he was loaded with the richness of his grace? Nor having glorified him by the acknowledgement of his blessings, now, at least, he ought to glorify him by the confession of his poverty.”²¹⁷ Therefore, psychology argues that suppressed shame leads to strain in relationships to the other, and theology claims that pride is the culprit for this insecure connection, seeing as postlapsarian humans would rather preserve their dignity than admit to their folly.

Calvin’s proposed solution to unstable relationships as a result of prideful concealment of shame is to do exactly what Adam and Eve did not: expose one’s shame to God, as to not give

²¹⁶ Arel 64.

²¹⁷ (II.II.1).

into the temptations of hubris and a false sense of dignity. It is through Calvin's ability to channel his shame into religious humility that preserves not his dignity, but his connection to God: "In fine, supplication for pardon, with humble and ingenuous confession of guilt, forms both the preparation and commencement of right prayer. For the holiest of men cannot hope to obtain anything from God until he has been freely reconciled to him."²¹⁸ While his proposition is sound in reason, it violates every intuitive psychological reaction to the experience of shame in praxis. As clarified by Arel prior, shame begets a fear of social rejection and ridicule, resulting in the shamed person seeking isolation from the other. How is it, then, that Calvin is the exception to the rule? Spoiler: he isn't.

In Julie Canlis's article addressing John Calvin's fear in God, she states the following: "He preferred to stay hidden, tucked away behind the generalities of common experience or of the royal 'we.'"²¹⁹ It is unsurprising to find that Calvin, preaching the importance of shame in religious belief, most likely lived in shame himself. Canlis continues on to observe that it is a rarity to find an account of Calvin's personhood without the additional mention of God.²²⁰ He was, wholeheartedly, consumed by his faith and his wretchedness, and by default, also his shame. Although he may have claimed that this festering shame and loss of self cultivated a more fervent understanding of God, we cannot ignore the evidence gathered from Canlis's biographical account of Calvin, depicting the young theologian as existentially fearful in his inability to connect with the Divine: "I am unwilling to speak about myself.' This was due to Calvin's desire for God's glory, as well as his deep desire to stay hidden."²²¹ While he was able to keep up this charade for some time, he ultimately caved into the realization that the self could

²¹⁸ (III.XX.9).

²¹⁹ Canlis 4.

²²⁰ Canlis 4.

²²¹ Canlis 7.

not subsist on its own without the other, proving Arel's theory and reestablishing Calvin's own assertion that knowledge of the self and God are inseparable: "Through the Psalms, Calvin discovered that he did not know God unless he knew himself; and he could not know himself unless he knew God. Calvin's sense of 'self' became profoundly marked by the presence of another."²²²

²²² Canlis 11.

Conclusion: My Shame, Our Shame

While the psychological and theological consequences of John Calvin's doctrine of original sin were relevant in the mid-1500s, what makes them relevant today? What lessons or insight can we take away from his edifice and apply it to our modern world? Suchocki reflects on the applicability of original sin to her dealings with racism, both institutionally and individually. She recounts:

"I saw these films, and absorbed their racism into the structures of my consciousness, never questioning why the African Americans lived separately in poorer homes, or why their occupations were so predictable in film to film, and in real life as well...I suggest that such ingrained attitudes of passive acceptance of great social evil create the substructure that supports the horrors of torture and lynching when and where they occur."²²³

Suchocki internalized the racist overtones and undertones of society as her own views, eventually thinking and behaving in a way that enabled such a broken and discriminatory system. She then goes on to make a seemingly lofty analysis:

"It is original sin, in that it is a pre-given structure of ill-being through which we view the world, inherited as the very stuff that forms the world *as* world. It becomes personal sin when, having the ability to question the structure, we fail to do so, and thus support and perpetuate the structure. The freedom to question introduces the reality of guilt."²²⁴

To further explain this convoluted conclusion, Suchocki compares original sin to human acquiescence of societal wrongdoing, whereas feelings of guilt mirror a sort of "self-transcendence, and not simply a transcendence of the society in which one lives."²²⁵ Therefore, she insinuates that like the implications of original sin, humankind is just as toxic and corrupt as

²²³ Suchocki 137.

²²⁴ Suchocki 137.

²²⁵ Suchocki 141.

our toxic and corrupt society. Pushing back against this corruption, or at the very least feeling guilty or uneasy at the prospect of playing into institutional discrimination, would qualify as Calvin's call to embodying the grace of Christ, himself. However, Suchocki is not naïve to the lessons of Arel's Affect Theory; she is plenty aware of how dangerous guilt can be, and understands that feeling guilty is not enough to combat modern manifestations of original sin. Like Arel, Suchocki proposes that forgiveness is imperative to effective change and transformation. However, she also recognizes that "forgiveness may be the most difficult of virtues."²²⁶ As described by Arel before, forgiveness of the self and others is challenging, because it involves vulnerability and risks social ridicule and ostracism. This is why violence, both against the self and others, is such a common result of pent up guilt that can ultimately morph into shame. Suchocki warns that true forgiveness "cannot be confused with a 'cheap grace' whereby persons do not have to deal with the consequences of their actions. On the contrary, well-being for a violator may involve coping with the rage and hatred within, learning how to forgive his or her own abusers, learning how to name one's guilt and forgive the self and others, learning how to reach out in caring."²²⁷ In essence, to forgive and transform is to put one's self in a place of complete and utter discomfort and naked exposure. Not only does this process seem unappealing, but completely averse. I know that when I am wronged, I do not respond with "memory, empathy, and imagination" as Suchocki propose we do.²²⁸ Instead, I will at best be disappointed and at worst agitated and defensive, both responses do not address the shame I internalize or the forgiveness that I should give and hope to receive. While Calvin would agree that agitation and defensiveness is no way to approach feelings of shame, he would also argue against the notion of fighting shame with radical empathy. As Canlis says in her article,

²²⁶ Suchocki 144.

²²⁷ Suchocki 147.

²²⁸ Suchocki 147.

“For those who knew daily fear, Calvin offered not stoic *tranquilitias* but terror and alienation converted into *fear of the Lord*. Calvin never moved fully from fear to peace, but rather experienced God in the very human battle between the two.”²²⁹ Unfortunately, such sentiments are echoed in western societies today that have been inundated with shaming culture characteristic of Evangelism and puritanism. Two examples come to mind: the 2007 documentary film *Jesus Camp* and the shaming culture of the criminal justice system in the United States, which often leads to recidivism.

We begin by exploring shame as presented in modern Christian platforms using the exemplar of *Jesus Camp*. In the film, directors Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing uncover the fear mongering tactics of the Kids on Fire School of Ministry, which is an evangelical summer camp run by camp director Becky Fischer.²³⁰ The film follows the spiritual journeys of three children, Levi, Rachael, and Tory, all of whom view their staunch devotion to Jesus Christ as paramount to leading a meaningful life. While this is all fine and well, the film also focuses on one child, Andrew Sommerkamp, who is particularly tormented by the unknowns of religiosity and the guilty feelings associated with this line of questioning: “‘I just want to talk about belief in God ... I’ve been having a hard time with it,’ he says, staring at the ground, scared and confused as the other kids look around at each other with anxiety in their eyes. ‘To believe in God is hard because you don’t see him, you don’t know him much. Sometimes I don’t even believe what the Bible says. It makes me a faker, it makes me feel guilty and bad.’”²³¹ Throughout the film, we learn that director Becky Fischer plays an instrumental role in conjuring up feelings of religious

²²⁹ Canlis 11.

²³⁰ Chang, Mira, et al. *Jesus Camp*, Magnolia Pictures, 2006, tubitv.com/movies/499307/jesus_camp.

²³¹ Hesse, Josiah. “The Kids of Jesus Camp, 10 Years Later: ‘Was It Child Abuse? Yes and No’.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 July 2016, www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later.

guilt among the children. In one scene, Fischer is seen working on a threatening poster that reads: “Punishment for Sin is Death,” adjusting the font size and style in order to make the message more frightening to the children.²³² Even worse is when Fischer speaks in front of the children earlier that same day, asserting that: “some kids here claim to be real Christians, but are one thing in church and another thing when you’re in school with your friends. You’re phony and a hypocrite.”²³³ The camera then pans to a room filled with crying children, who worry that Fischer is directing these comments at them and that their “phony” behaviors will result in divine retribution. This example may seem extreme, but the truth is that as of 2012, evangelicals make up 30-35% of the population in the United States and are part of the only Christian denomination that is growing in the age of secularization.²³⁴ Why would such a militant form of Christianity gain such a substantial—and growing!—following? To answer this, one only has to look as far as the impacts of Augustinian theology, and thus Calvin’s theological edifice that developed thereafter. As mentioned before, Calvin preached that fear is integral to “proper reverence,”²³⁵ such fear would not exist without Augustine’s notion of original sin, for the basis of Calvin’s anxiety lies in his inability to emulate God’s grace, due to the wretched nature of humankind: “Our hearts are frightened, and they falter, because there is nothing more difficult for us than to come to realize that God is gracious.”²³⁶ Tory, one of the children closely followed in *Jesus Camp*, is already aware of the promiscuity assigned to female bodies, including her own, and the sins of placing the female form on display. A dancer, Tory makes it clear to the viewer that when she performs, she does so for Jesus, and not for “sins of the flesh.” Tory makes a point to say this

²³² Chang, Mira, et al. *Jesus Camp*

²³³ Chang, Mira, et al. *Jesus Camp*

²³⁴ Eskridge, Larry. “How Many Evangelicals Are There?” *How Many Evangelicals Are There?* | Wheaton, Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, 2012.

²³⁵ Canlis 5.

²³⁶ Canlis 6.

not because, she herself, is sexually promiscuous—she’s only ten!—but because she *fears* that her dancing could imply shameful desires.²³⁷ Fischer imposes said fear, shame, and trauma on individuals from an early age, which, as Arel explains, can dictate the trajectory of one’s self-concept. When exploring Léon Wurmser’s idea of abusive touch, Arel states: “A lack of touch leads a child to imagine that something is inherently wrong with him or her; thus, the child feels shame. In order to combat the pain of not being touched, which typically manifests in the anxiety of being abandoned...the child wishes for any type of touch, including abusive touch.”²³⁸ When Fischer proposes that the campers disappoint Jesus with their so-called hypocrisy, the children cling onto the harmful and abusive words of Fischer in hopes of not being abandoned by their faith altogether. Perhaps this is why Evangelism has such a large and reliable following; people are uncomfortable with the prospect of the unknown and will do just about anything to gain a sense of peace, even if that entails degradation of the self. But why is this the case? Langer and Ellyn explore the appeal of Cartesian Certainty offered by Evangelism, finding it to be the lifeblood of the religious movement via a “cognitive-propositional approach, which may be associated with fundamentalism and most forms of neo-evangelism,” emphasizing “the cognitive aspects of religion and stress[ing] the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.”²³⁹ In this manner, Evangelism abandons Christian “ideology,” and supposes Christian “actualization.”²⁴⁰ As postulated by Kierkegaard, “Christianity is not a doctrine, but an ‘existence-communication.’”²⁴¹ This Kierkegaardian claim extends to the exhibitions of Evangelism in our world today. *Jesus Camp* shows more than the unfair manipulation of young children and the toxicity of religious dogmatism. The film

²³⁷ Chang, Mira, et al. *Jesus Camp*

²³⁸ Arel 134.

²³⁹ Langer, Ellyn 63.

²⁴⁰ Langer, Ellyn 67.

²⁴¹ Langer, Ellyn 67.

addresses the primal human desire to have certainty, and Evangelism's supposed solution to this need.

Now that shame as presented in the modern Christian context has been laid, we can apply these devastating psychological consequences to institutional injustices witnessed today. The starkest of examples is incarceration and treatment of prisoners in the United States. In John Braithwaite's article entitled "Shame and criminal justice," the criminologist analyzes two forms of shaming: reintegrative shaming and stigmatization. Braithwaite claims that "Reintegrative shaming communicates disapproval within a continuum of respect for the offender: the offender is treated as a good person who has done a bad deed. Stigmatization is disrespectful shaming: the offender is treated as a bad person."²⁴² With this assertion, Braithwaite assumes that shame can be either forgiving or humiliating, which aligns with both Arel and Calvin's interpretations of shame within the Christian context. For Arel, shame can be productive if channeled in a manner that builds relationships of trust and empathy.²⁴³ Calvin, as previously discussed, views shame as forgiving, relentless, *and* completely necessary in order to reach a higher realm of piety.²⁴⁴ However, perhaps unbeknownst to Calvin, his advocacy for stigmatization could result in criminology, rather than anticipated Godly devotion: "when people shame us in a degrading way, this poses a threat to our identity...When respectable society rejects me, I have a status problem. Criminal subcultures can supply that solution."²⁴⁵ This mirrors Suchocki's theory that untreated guilt and shame foster organized crime, such as violent gangs and protests, thus providing a new identity to the socially rejected. So, how can shame be implemented respectfully? To Braithwaite, it all comes down to the support from family and friends: "It is family we love,

²⁴² Braithwaite, John. "Shame and Criminal Justice." *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, vol. 42, no. 3, July 2000, pp. 281-298.

²⁴³ Arel 169.

²⁴⁴ Canlis 5-6.

²⁴⁵ Braithwaite 287.

friends we respect who have most influence over us. Precisely because their relationships with us are based on love and respect, when they shame us they will do so reintegratively.”²⁴⁶ He also

suggests institutional implementations of restorative justice that may reduce recidivism:

“Families, schools, and indigenous communities are preeminently important sites for restorative justice in civil society for preventing crimes of the powerless. Workplaces are the most important sites for restorative justice to prevent crimes of the powerful. . . state-run restorative justice programs as an alternate to court have become increasingly important in the criminal justice systems of all Western societies.”²⁴⁷

While these concepts may seem good in theory, their generality and idealistic elements challenge their applicability in real time. While we may like to think that our families will shower us in loving and respectful forms of discipline, reality paints another picture: shame, embarrassment, and disappointment may result in severely strained familial relationships that risk irreparability, which is especially true for offenders of more serious crimes.²⁴⁸ While criminologists have found that fear of situating family and friends in such positions of shame can aid in inhibiting crime, it does not mitigate the stigmatization that people experience in the case that they do, in fact, offend.²⁴⁹ In other words, stigmatization from family and friends may help inhibit crime, but only psychologically harms the offender after they *have* committed a crime. At that point, according to both Braithwaite and Arel, a person requires empathy and forgiveness from those close to him/her. If reintegrative shaming cannot be found within an offender’s personal and social circles, we turn to examples of respectful shaming and appropriate punishment institutionally. Unfortunately, such institutional implementations of restorative justice starkly go

²⁴⁶ Braithwaite 287.

²⁴⁷ Braithwaite 292-293.

²⁴⁸ Rebellon et.al. 988.

²⁴⁹ Rebellon et.al. 989.

against Western societies' culture of retributivism. In an NPR interview with law school professors Jonathan Turley and Peter Moskos, host Scott Simon probes the two men about their opinions on public shaming. In response to one of Simon's interview questions, Moskos replies with the following: "But the purpose of incarceration, ironically, is to make someone feel ashamed, at the end; we just have this horrible middle process to get someone there. We want people to feel shame - and see what they did was wrong. So I see no problem, really, in jumping to the end and then going right for the shame, and skipping a process that we know just harms people and makes them more criminal."²⁵⁰ Moskos echoes the retributivist culture that circulates throughout our modern society. He then punches back at propositions for restorative justice measures: "My problem with prison reformers - and I support them - is, it doesn't work. Prison reformers have been talking about reforming prisons for four decades now while the problem's only gotten worse. Punishment should be part of the criminal justice system. The question is how we punish, and there's got to be a better way to do it than prison."²⁵¹ Even Braithwaite will admit that restorative justice tactics are still too new and underdeveloped for its efficacy to be properly compared to the current prison system.²⁵² This is not to say that social movements devoted to prison reform are pointless, but instead that no better, more effective system has been found and implemented across the decades of prison overflow and injustice. In "Anticipated shaming and criminal offending," a team of criminologists found that the certainty of punishment in some way, shape, or form has proven to be a major factor in one's decision to offend.²⁵³ This circles back to previous statements made by Arel, which indicate the dangers of utilizing one's shame to

²⁵⁰ Simon, Scott. "Some Judges Prefer Public Shaming To Prison." *Some Judges Prefer Public Shaming To Prison*, NPR News, 24 Aug. 2013.

²⁵¹ Simon, Scott. "Some Judges Prefer Public Shaming To Prison."

²⁵² Braithwaite 294.

²⁵³ Rebellon et.al. 991.

further shame the self and others without proper redress. Sure, pushing down one's shame may work for a time, but it will ultimately infiltrate the mind and body, resulting in adverse effects.²⁵⁴

What can we take away from the above examples? For me, the two outstanding lessons of the exemplars are that 1) we experience shame both implicitly and explicitly and 2) shame cannot be eliminated from our culture altogether, but must be appropriately regulated, in order to make use of its benefits. Virginia Burrus poignantly addresses these two points in the preface of her book, *Saving Shame*. The preface, entitled *My Shame*, provides the reader with insight into Burrus's personal life and upbringing. *My Shame* is meant to be very intimate and vulnerable, she explains, for both shame and shamelessness involves raw exposure of the self.²⁵⁵ Burrus utilizes the discomforts of her past to work through her troubles at present. In this essay, we spoke of bodily shame. Although it was within the context of Adam and Eve's nudity in Eden, it extends to shame that we feel in our own bodies today. Burrus offers her own account of dealing with bodily discomfort as a young woman growing up in the south:

“We were encouraged to pile our plates high with ham, macaroni and cheese, starchy vegetables casseroles, jello salad, banana pie made with vanilla wafers—comfort foods for comforting and comfortable bodies that were simultaneously ashamed and shameless... Sometimes I took refuge in them; sometimes I shied away—a fact of which I am still slightly ashamed, an ambivalence I still carry in my own body.”²⁵⁶

As a woman myself, I greatly relate to Burrus's experience. With societal standards of women's bodies constantly changing, it has become impossible to appease everyone, including oneself.

While I did not grow up in the south, I did grow up in a Jewish family, in which food was a primary mode of showing affection and care. My mother, after slaving away in the kitchen for

²⁵⁴ Arel 47-48.

²⁵⁵ Burrus ix.

²⁵⁶ Burrus x.

hours, would produce beautiful Shabbat dinners consisting of sweet and eggy challah, dense matzo balls sinking in chicken broth, moist chicken—usually an entire bird—, and varying side dishes to tie the meal together. My siblings and I were spoiled with good food, and to this day, food remains a major comfort to all of us. We loved, and continue to love food, and take great joy in eating it with the people we love. However, as Burrus explains, with shamelessness comes shame, and I soon took notice of my classmates’ comments on my “squishy, sluggish” body during P.E., the disgusted look on the saleswoman’s face when my mom asked her to retrieve a woman’s size small, since I had outgrown a children’s size 14; and my Russian grandmother’s plea to my parents, “she has to lose the weight” as squeezed my chubby thigh. My body soon became a rejected one, and my mission to change it completely went against my passion for food, and all of the joys that came with it. I would be remiss if I said these comments do not affect me to this day. They most certainly do. Like Burrus and Tory, my body was first scandalized by society, and then scrutinized by myself. Similarly, those in prison face shame, but in a different form: instead of scrutiny, offenders face demonization from the rest of society. Offenders commit a crime, are villainized by the external world, and thus villainize themselves, thus leading to immense shame and, likely, recidivism. As stated prior, guilt is entirely external.²⁵⁷ We can remedy guilt through an action—such as a verbal apology or a good deed—whereas the same cannot be said about shame. Shame is both external and internal: “in guilt the self remains unified; in shame parts of the self (or the whole self) are renounced or considered ‘bad’ and inferior.”²⁵⁸ This is not to say that guilt does not affect the implicit self, but that it does not cause long-lasting damage to the self because of its external properties. It is in this way that

²⁵⁷ Arel 36.

²⁵⁸ Arel 36.

shame is both received by the other and internalized by the self, paradoxically making the ‘cure’ for shame reattachment to the other in order to reattach to the self.

Secondly, we turn to the second lesson: reintegrating beneficial shame into our lives, while exterminating the scrutinizing form of shame. Burrus refers to this phenomenon as “outing shame,” since it has been seen as a solely negative concept for so long. Burrus refers to shame as both “productively transformative” and “destructively inhibiting,” explaining how these two forms often overlap in the Christian tradition.²⁵⁹ She argues that Christianity does not shy away from shame, but instead “embraces shame shamelessly,” which is not only ironic, but seemingly works against the very elements of shame, itself. Burrus, however, goes on to describe what shameless shame looks like: “an empathetic awareness of our capacity both to shame and to be shamed—serves as a guard against the violence of shaming, protecting privacy and dignity, cultivating not only tact but a positive sense of awe in the face of what is at once most vulnerable and most sacred in human existence.”²⁶⁰ This aligns greatly with Calvin’s belief in yielding to one’s shame, in order to fully recognize human flaw and embrace the Divine power. However, getting to this stage of healthy acceptance and confrontation of one’s shame is an extreme difficulty. How are we supposed to eliminate all “bad” shame and internalize all “good”? Candidly, Burrus admits: “There is no escape from shame because we are always already marked by shame,”²⁶¹ thus suggesting that we will never stop experiencing the scrutinizing manifestation of shame. That being said, shame is needed to cultivate shamelessness. It is also needed to reveal one’s vulnerability and open oneself to love and affection.²⁶² In a society riddled with shame, refusing shame altogether is refusing the possibility of love and true companionship. Therefore,

²⁵⁹ Burrus 4.

²⁶⁰ Burrus 3.

²⁶¹ Burrus xii.

²⁶² Burrus xii.

if we try to live a completely shameless life, we may be yielding the same affect that allowing shame to dictate one's life has.²⁶³ Just as Braithwaite stated above, receiving messages of shame and disappointment from family members *in addition to* constant familial love and support diminishes crime and crime recidivism among offenders. Even if being shamed by family and loved ones hurts more than anything else, that shame is a portrayal of love and care. As Arel points out: "Empathy facilitates an ability to tolerate and intentionally engage in painful affects such as shame,"²⁶⁴ suggesting that one has to experience some attachment to the other before s/he can experience shame. In the case of families of offenders, their shame is a display of love, because without care or desire for a connection, the notion of shame dissipates entirely.²⁶⁵ Perhaps this is what Calvin was trying to communicate in a circuitous manner, since he often refers to original sin and its consequences as demonstrative of God's mercy. God punished Adam and Eve, because like the parents of offenders, He expected more of His children.²⁶⁶ Additionally, the mysterious characteristics of predestination are not to deceive, but serve to instill reverence and fear in God's followers, for God could just as well save none of our wretched souls.²⁶⁷ Therefore, despite Calvin's anxiety-riddled heart and panic-stricken mind, the concept of shame may in fact have attenuated his theological qualms.²⁶⁸ In reference to the Psalms, Calvin takes pleasure in the fact that "we have permission and freedom granted us to lay open before him our infirmities which we would be ashamed to confess before men...there is no other book in which there is to be found...the unparalleled liberality of God...and his fatherly providence."²⁶⁹ Circling back to the appeal of certainty that Evangelism offers, a constant source

²⁶³ Burrus xii.

²⁶⁴ Arel 161.

²⁶⁵ Arel 42.

²⁶⁶ (II.I.1).

²⁶⁷ (II.II.17).

²⁶⁸ Canlis 9.

²⁶⁹ Canlis 9.

of certainty to Calvin was God's grace. God's grace was not ephemeral or unstable in nature, but everlasting and reliable. And to be ashamed of one's lowliness was to honor the impenetrable greatness of the Lord, and that was, and continues to be, a tantalizing attraction for those in search of a silver lining in this wretched world.

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