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The Crime of Reason

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Man always wants what he can't have. Whether it is knowledge, beauty, fame, or power, there is a fine line between natural or necessary desire and covetousness, one of the Deadly Sins. A certain degree of greed is instinctual and necessary in society, which makes defining the sin difficult. However, man is gifted with reason with which he can control instinctual and cultured desires, and when he does not use his gift, he submits to sin.

Even as early as childhood, greed begins to show itself in man. A child fighting over another child's toy is a common display of man wanting what he can't have. However, a child does not learn covetousness, it is an instinctual human quality. A child must learn to repress his greed through experience, often lessons such as 'sharing'. If left alone, or even nurtured, greedy behavior quickly develops into sinful habits and uncontrollable covetousness. Faustus' love of learning, though harmless at first, was nurtured by his kinsmen at Wittenberg. He quickly earned the title of Doctor, and soon became unsatisfied with what knowledge he had. His dissatisfaction drove him to necromancy, "that famous art [w]herein all nature's treasure is contained" (I.i.72-73), because he wanted more than just knowledge. His greed then spread to beauty, fame, and power.

Greed for knowledge is man's original sin. By learning and hoarding knowledge, man destroys his innocence. As a child, one is relatively unaware of 'adult' problems and does not have to deal with their moral implications. A child cannot sin because he is unaware that his actions are wrong. He cannot be blamed for innocence. However, as man grows older, his instinctual lust for knowledge leads him learn what is sinful, and can no longer plead innocence, only seek forgiveness for wrongdoing.

Because it destroys innocence, greed for knowledge is sinful, but it is also

inevitable, so man cannot be blamed for it. It is impossible for man to live life without learning what is right and wrong. Man can only be blamed for failing to use his knowledge to make moral decisions. Knowledge is both a gift and a curse to mankind. Since man cannot reverse the curse of original sin, it is his responsibility to make the best use of the gift. Man must use knowledge to improve himself, not only on a personal level, but on a societal level. He cannot use his knowledge simply to keep himself free of sin, but he must use it to teach others to avoid sin. Greed for knowledge is only sinful when man fails to use his knowledge wisely. Not only did Faustus sin by selling his soul to the devil, but he also sinned by disregarding his knowledge of Scripture in the decision, declaring "Divinity, adieu!" (I.i.46) and "Divinity is the basest of the three..." (I.i.103).

Man's instinctual greed is not limited to the lust for knowledge. The desire for beauty also naturally exists in man. Every person has a concept of beauty that he recognizes and desires, whether he wishes for himself to be more beautiful or lusts for the beauty of another. Man does not learn to be attracted to qualities of beauty, the attraction is natural and instinctual. Man's concept of beauty can be influenced by society, but for the most part it is rooted in primal desire. Popular concepts of beauty can sway man's individual tastes. If certain qualities are emphasized as beautiful, man soon becomes attracted to those qualities.

Man must learn to control his greed for beauty. If he becomes too obsessed with his own beauty, he is guilty of Pride; if he allows his lust for others' beauty to control him, he is guilty of Lechery. Both are deadly sins. Man is given a weapon to combat his animal instincts, however. He can use his intelligence to recognize sinful behavior, and although he cannot eliminate his instinctual desires, he can control his actions so they don't reflect the sinful instinct. Faustus allows his animal instincts free reign after he sells his soul, asking Mephistophilis "let me have a wife, the fairest maid in Germany, for I am wanton and lascivious and cannot live without a wife" (II.i.46-48). Faustus' greed destroys his self-control, as his original lust for knowledge spreads to lust for power and beauty. By

selling his soul, he eliminated the natural barriers to attaining these things, and consequently his personal barriers against sin.

The appetite for fame is a uniquely human trait. It is not instinctual, but cultivated by society. As a child, a person sees role models such as kings and the pope, and the respect that normal people have for these elevated people, and begins to desire fame for himself so that he can enjoy the same respect of all mankind that these figures do. His desire for fame can be repressed or cultivated, but it is initially society that ceates the desire, not instinct.

Man can become introverted as a result of the actions of the famous, as well as be moved to desire fame. Man might be exposed to more of the downside of fame, having one's life on stage for everyone to judge, and begin to loathe the idea of being famous himself, or he might be moved by concept of widespread public attention and wish to be famous himself. In either case, though, it is society that cultivates these desires, they are not natural. Furthermore, society provides the defense against greed for fame as well as the greed itself. Society makes it difficult to achieve the kind of fame that causes people to envy the famous. It requires an extraordinary act to achieve fame, and one cannot find extraordinary things to accomplish without working to find them. Faustus used black magic to raise the dead and thus gained fame among the nobles of society as a great entertainer, but he sacrificed his soul to achieve these ends. The shortest road to fame is through sin.

The desire for power is less of an cultural desire than fame, as it contains elements of instinct. It is natural for man to want control of his environment, just as the lion instinctually controls his territory. However, society does not allow man to gain power easily. Since every man is trying to gain power, it is difficult for any one person to become too powerful because his fellow man will not allow it. This natural barrier protects man from sinning on the side of greed for power.

Occasionally, man finds or creates enough opportunity for gaining power, and

becomes more powerful than the average man. Corporate executives, whether their power was earned or not, have tremendous power over the lives of their employees and power associated with having money. If the power was earned, man has greater respect for it and does not let it interfere with his judgment. However, if man accidentally gains power or does not have to work to attain it, he is not as likely to recognize its danger to his judgment. Power gives greed the opportunity to overcome man's better judgment. The gain of power eliminates the need to work for things that one desires, because power grants them easily and quickly. Without the natural deterrent to satisfying his greed, man quickly loses the ability to control his desires, and consequently, power eliminates man's protection from sin. Faustus allowed exactly this to happen. He gained tremendous power without hard work, which interfered with his judgment. He soon submitted to the sins of greed for knowledge, fame, and beauty, because his power gave him the opportunity to indulge his desires.

Since most sins of desire have an element of instinct, greed cannot be strictly defined as sinful. However, when man allows his greed to control his actions, instead of his intelligence, greed becomes Deadly Covetous. Man is given his intellect in order to temper his instinct with wisdom. If man chooses to ignore wisdom he is allowing sin to control his life.