

The Sins of Society

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Moral judgments are examined through social moral standards and judgments based on social structures according to religion. This study addresses the social structures and religious base of "*The Seven Deadly Sins*" in the attempt to understand how society accepts and rejects the seven deadly sins in terms of social structures and behaviors.

¹Sociology does not determine moral judgments, society pronounces moral judgments. These moral judgments are based on social structures such as religion and families base moralities, while sociology is neither a religion nor a family. In this manner, sociologists claim to eliminate the pressures to determine morality; they are neutral in the manner of sin. Sin and evil are exempt from sociological text, which is intriguing to read a book that defines the "seven deadly sins." The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil by Stanford M. Lyman revolves around the seven deadly sins in the context of sociological researchers.

Historically, the seven deadly sins were first listed in early Christian teachings. The lists of sins are sloth, lust, anger, pride, envy, gluttony and greed. These sins were devised as paramount to abstain from these actions.

Christian philosophers would write and preach of the importance of abstaining from these sins. "In this manner, rules were created in which to abstain from these seven sins (Lyman)."

The Seven Deadly Sins is a creative manner in order to describe sociological concepts. The description of sin is provided with many descriptive manners of the seven deadly sins and created on a religious base. While religious values tend to deviate from sociological research, religious values were included in this book in seemingly non-religious writing. Auguste Comte, one of the early nineteenth century sociologists, claimed that societies were evolving to a society of finding faith in science rather than religion (Lyman 1). Science of sociology would solve society's tribulations.

According to Lyman, Comte was incorrect in his analysis that religion would have been eliminated in importance. Religion is intertwined in society, thus society has not eliminated religion. While one may not be religious,

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this does not preclude that these religious beliefs will be eliminated. The "Protestant Ethic" is an example where one could not be religious, but practice Protestant beliefs. The one who saves the penny in order to gain capital is an example of practicing religious beliefs in a secular manner. According to Max Weber, these beliefs are rooted in Protestant religious ideology.

This type of Protestant belief could be interwoven in the evil of greed, since one is acquiring capital for himself. Evil is described in the terms of anomie. It is in this manner in which people have escaped the ties from society. These ties constrain people to behave in a manner that is considered socially acceptable. When someone has anomie, there must be punishment affixed in order for the act to be considered evil (Lyman 4). It is fascinating that the word "*Acedia*" is utilized frequently in the book in reference to the sin of sloth. *Acedia* is a Greek word that means "withdrawal of one's self (Lyman 8)."

In this manner one is taught religious and colloquial manners in which to follow society's rules. Religions preach to obey religious teachings, while sociological researchers persuade people to obey their own teachings. The sociological and religious teachings can be similar in that people are taught similar behavioral methods. People are taught not to personify "sloth" as one of the deadly sins, while sociological teachings utilize different terminology. Marx describes how in a communist society, members of the society would be industrious and not idle. Marx does not utilize the word "sloth," (Lyman 15) but he does indicate

that industrious behavior is the goal in a communist society.

This perspective perpetuates the idea that there is a sense of morality in society. While researchers may never indicate that there is a definite right and wrong, there is the subtle right and wrong in research methods. Researchers such as Marx have their own perspective of morality, which can seep into research. Researchers are in society that binds them to follow societal rules. The sense of having a neutral perspective on morality can be difficult to accomplish.

Therefore, free will versus societal influences is not always delineated. He describes these influences in the relationship to the sin: "sloth." "Sloth" is akin to boredom in routines and in creating nothing different in life. The description is provided in the way "the individual has become in a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and power which tear from his hands all progress (Lyman 19)." It may be difficult to escape these ties that closely bind the self. These ties are in the colloquial and religious realms of society providing stability in society where the goal is for societal members to not acquire anomie.

These influences created future themes about the societal influences on people. Lyman writes how most "mankind the tides flow toward the farther shore of unfreedom (Lyman 120)." In "unfreedom," it is infinitely reasonable to assume that humans are not responsible for the self, rather the society is responsible for the self (Lyman 119). People full of anger are created by societal forces, rather than individual attributes. Some people are

“fated” to belong to these angry masses (Lyman 120).

While these societal influences are strong, it may appear difficult to understand the reasons for evil. It could be that society changes views of evil. Lyman writes that Aristotle had the perspective that “ambitious” was when “men desire both more and less than they deserve (Lyman 139).” While the sin of pride was viewed of the great evil of being ambitious, society has had a slightly different view of pride. In today’s society, it is necessary to have a certain amount of pride in order to attain a profession. A prospective employer needs to be guaranteed that the prospective employee has above average skills in order to succeed in the profession. In the quandary of the prospective employee, the employee must be humble as to not create an arrogant persona. Therefore, the sin of pride is viewed as a confusing attribute in the example of the prospective employee.

In another example, society has created a different perspective of “*Sloth*”. It has decreased the enormity of the sin to a mere emotion (Lyman 24). The emotion of boredom, which is not considered one of the sins that are constantly taught in religious sermons in modern society. Lyman writes how students in classrooms are bored, but that is acceptable. The sin of the slothful person begins with the evil of being a sloth. The definition of the word is now akin to lazy. It is not a paramount evil to be lazy, it is thought of as an irksome trait. It is the example of the student who always attends class late, but the student is not thought of as an evil person rather thought of as acquiring an

irksome trait. The student will not be severely punished or ostracized by society.

The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil provides definition of mores. Would one’s own mores be different, if one lived in a different society? The book explains the different historical meanings of the seven deadly sins. Lust is described historically how lust is evil. A virgin is considered on a higher hierarchy than the married woman, presumably having sexual intercourse with her husband (Lyman 85). The allowances for sexual intercourse are given in only the opportunity to produce children, thus allowing for lust. The history of lustful acts begins with the virgin and as time goes on; there are more allowances for sexual intercourse. If one lived in the life of the esteemed virgins, then would one desire to always remain celibate? Would there be fewer men and women desiring to acquire romantic relationships?

While celibacy was esteemed, the lust is allowable in order to procreate. These allowances are providing the parameters of categorizing people who can produce children. “Sons and daughters are encouraged in countless ways to seek romantic love and erotic satisfactions among the strangers whom they encounter in school (Lyman 79).” Therefore, brothers and sisters do not have romantic encounters among each other. In this respect, this sin is lust. Lust is only allowable among strangers in specific parameters and is necessary in order to produce children, making this sin contradictory.

African-Americans and their relation to discrimination is an example of this, which creates difficulties for

African-Americans to acquiring social mobility (Lyman 122). Lyman provides the example of the research conducted by Dollard. In Dollard's research, anger is a response due to the condition of frustration (Lyman 122). Frustration could arise in such experiences as discrimination. Some African-Americans have become angry due to discrimination. Therefore, the evil of anger is not necessarily an individual choice; rather, it is an outcome due to societal influences.

Lyman writes that these deviant terms are not considered sins; rather, they are given a different wording in the social sciences. Lyman writes, "greed reforms itself as 'the spirit of capitalism': gluttony fades into addiction" (Lyman 119). The social sciences do not refer to deadly sins such as gluttony in research; rather, it is termed as addiction. This evil is only considered evil when there are sanctions in society. Therefore, the sociologist is neutral to sin because they do not determine sin; rather society determines sin in sanctions.

The author presumes that the deep voices, strong chin, and a beard tend to express anger. The author is describing the male gender, which receives more authority than females. It is not necessarily how the males look; rather, it is the fact that they are males that causes the greater threat of aggression (Lyman 132). This only describes the Power Elite, who can exercise more power thus allowing for expression of anger. Anger is a social creation that allows for anger among males, since men are only a product of the society that creates them. It appears in this context that females are

considered the greater evil when they experience anger since they do not have the same allowances for anger as men.

Another form of anger is the sin of envy. One of the examples of envy is ethnic groups not assimilating and not becoming part of the "melting pot (Lyman 201)." An example is provided where Rose Hum Lee noticed that Chinese people were not assimilating while the Japanese people "achieved much greater integration into white society (Lyman 201)." In a capitalist society such as America, it is helpful to the bourgeoisie to have a working class. Therefore, it is helpful to have ethnic groups blaming other ethnic groups for not assimilating, rather than blaming the bourgeoisie who make it difficult to succeed in this country. The sin of envy is advantageous for the bourgeoisie to encourage this sin.

It is difficult in the book to discern opinion versus researched analysis of concepts. Lyman references from the book Native Son where the opinion according to Lyman is that of an African-American man who "unintentionally" kills a Caucasian woman (Lyman 117). In the book, another perspective reveals the African-American man using a pillow to cover the woman's face until she stopped moving. Doing so would logically kill the victim. The author of Native Son writes, "frantically, he caught a corner of the pillow and brought it to her lips (Wright 97)," thus allowing for her to suffocate and die. The woman did not indicate that she wanted to have her head covered; rather, the character was attempting to make the woman quiet. In the book, the author Richard Wright writes from the perspective that it is

from the unintentional killer. It is an interesting perspective that Lyman does not mention that the character also “unintentionally” killed another woman, an African-American woman. Although at the finality of the book, it does appear that the man did commit a sin. The man received the death penalty for the killing of the Caucasian woman. Perhaps this is an example of Lyman’s own sense of morality seeping into his book. As he has provided examples of sociologists with their own viewpoints of morality seeping into research, he has created similar research in his book.

Parsons would assert that it is functional to have a high degree of control over the society’s members (Lyman 289). Functionalism is what Parsons referred to as parts of society working together in a cohesive manner. This is the similar manner in which body parts work in a cohesive manner in order for the body to function. Deviant behavior in functionalism maintains that for social order, there must be positive and negative rewards, which would then discern what is required in society (Lyman 78). Lyman writes how this control is woven in the sin of lust according to Parsons. “Parsons points to the necessity for a mother ‘to control her own regressive needs (Lyman 79).” While Parsons asserted that society must work in parts to maintain the function of societies, there is the difficulty of determining how to behave in these parts. In American society, there has never been a shared religion making it difficult to have a conclusiveness of morals in religious context (Lyman 292). The conclusiveness of morals is to the extent of when legal matters can be imposed on society members. For

example, lust is illegal in rape. It is legal for people to engage in extramarital affairs, but it may not be acceptable for some people. Extramarital affairs cannot be enforced in legalities, which can become complicated if one spouse finds this form of lust acceptable while the other spouse does not. This may be an enforcement of exclusion from the marriage to the degree of divorce.

In conclusion, the seven deadly sins are widely used in society. While the seven deadly sins are not given the same importance in the nineteenth century, these deadly sins are still utilized. Lustful acts are still reprimanded in the extent of penitentiary punishment and other lustful acts can receive punishment in the extent of group exclusion. Morality is woven into research in the example of Karl Marx. We have our morality, which is impossible to escape these societal pressures to follow the definition of right and wrong. It is not only an individual decision to decide what is right and wrong; rather it is formed on socialization of the self. It makes the self wonder how society might change morality in the future.

REFERENCES

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