

Reincarnation, Original Sin, and Substitutionary Atonement



Reincarnation

Reincarnation presupposes that some part of oneself (the body, or a consciousness/mind) continues on. If so, **everyone** ought to remember a previous life. Yet apart from a few unverifiable, one-sided claims, we can say definitively that people **do not** know their past lives. And if every being is born each time as a wholly **new** person with a wholly **new** body and mind, then reincarnation is meaningless.

"Plato defines death as the **separation** of body and soul." 1) "In the *Phaedo*, Plato has Socrates say: 'Those who live without shunning **gluttony, debauchery, and drunkenness** will be reborn as donkeys or animals of that sort. Those who choose **injustice, tyranny, and violence** will be reborn as wolves, hawks, or kites. Ordinary people who practice **temperance** and **justice** will be reborn as social creatures—bees, ants—or as humans. Lastly, philosophers and lovers of learning, having become perfectly pure at death, can meet the gods.'" 2)

"The **Egyptians** thought the soul completes a cycle every **3,000 years**. During a cycle, after a human dies, the soul lives in the forms of animals, insects, fish, birds, and so on, before returning as a human." 3) ... "And in Exodus 3:14, when Yahweh calls himself '**I AM THAT I AM**' (or 'I am who I am'), this too is a plagiarism of the Egyptian name for their god, **Nuk-pu-Nuk** ('I am that I am')." 4)

"They calculated a single cycle as exactly **2,842 years**—but believed the cycle does not begin if the **corpse is preserved** from decay. Thinking that preserved bodies could return **directly** as humans without passing through lower animals, they embalmed bodies as **mummies**." 5)

In 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul discusses the "**resurrection body**," he writes: "Someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With **what kind of body** do they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare **kernel**, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of **seed** its own body. **Not all flesh is the same**; there is one kind for **humans**, another for **animals**, another for **birds**, and another for **fish**. There are **heavenly** bodies and **earthly** bodies, and the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another" (vv. 35–40). Paul's thought shows **Greek** influence and amounts to a definition of **reincarnation**. The **underlined** portion speaks of distinct "flesh" for humans, animals, birds, and **fish**—broadening Plato's scheme (humans, beasts, birds) by adding fish.

If a person in one era were to discover that his identity in a previous era is **one and the same** with another person—that he was, say, the **Buddha** or **Jesus**—the resulting identity-confusion would be so severe that he would likely go mad.

Even if past lives existed, **no consciousness** carries over to the next. Depending on one's deeds in a previous life, various strands might **branch** and then appear as **other beings** in the next—yet at that point the body no longer exists, so there is **nothing** to house consciousness or thought. Thus **mind** or **consciousness** perishes **with** the body. Only something like **energy** or **vibration** separates out and, resonating with kindred vibrations, may appear in another form in a subsequent life.

Original Sin and Substitutionary Atonement

The concepts of **original sin** and **substitutionary atonement** were **not** the intent of Yahweh or Jesus. "Original sin" appears nowhere in Yahweh's Law or in Jesus' teaching. Around the **fifth century**, however, the theologian **Augustine** articulated the doctrine of original sin, and it became church dogma. The hypothesis that all humanity is stained with guilt because the mythical **Adam and Eve** sinned is irrational and unconvincing.

The claim that people are sinful **from birth** derives from lines such as, "**The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all**" (Isaiah 53:6), and "**All have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). 6)

"From the story, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat; **for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die**' (Genesis 2:16–17), Augustine teased out a clue to original sin as **human nature**. He took Adam and Eve's revolt as a **metaphor** for an innate propensity to sin. The first to introduce the concept of 'original sin' into Christianity, however, was **Irenaeus**, who also played a major role in fixing the four canonical

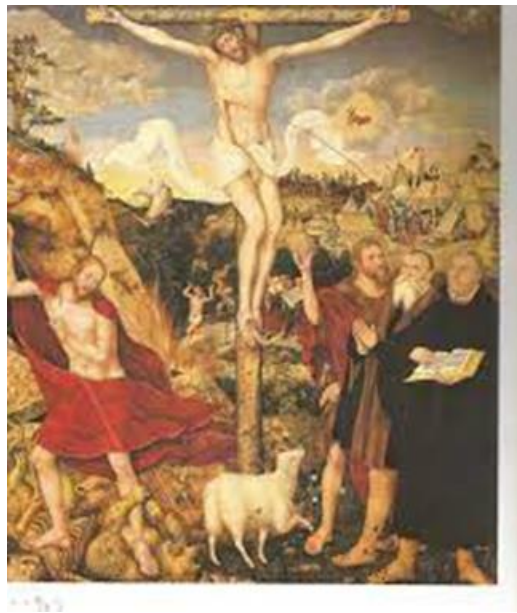
Gospels. In *Against Heresies* he says Adam's descendants are born **captives** to sin and death; Adam is the conduit by which Satan brought sin into the world. Augustine then developed Irenaeus's account and explained its **transmission**: sin, he thought, is passed to the next generation through the **concupiscence** inherent in sexual intercourse." 7)



That **all humanity** bears the dishonor of original sin because of the conduct of a **legendary** Jewish couple—who happen also to be claimed as the **first ancestors**—is simply not believable. Yet doctrines of **original sin** and **atonement**, invented by mere theologians rather than God or Jesus, took hold as Christian dogma, and those who questioned them were branded **heretics**, cast out, tortured, even **burned**.

Likewise, the doctrine that Jesus' death **liberated** humanity from original sin—**substitutionary atonement**—can carry no weight. Atonement as a doctrinal system begins with **Paul's** claims 8) and was developed by the church; it was **not** Jesus'

intent. It appears from **Luke** onward and in **Paul's letters**; the **other Gospels** say nothing of the kind. The claim is that by Jesus' shed blood on the **cross**, humanity's sins were washed away and we were saved. If Jesus' sacrificial death atoned for sin once for all, then one should **never again** hold people accountable for past sins—which would require abolishing original sin altogether.



"The atonement theology that says God, **instead of** putting to death the sinners who deserve it, sacrificed **his own son** may make some Christians love Jesus, but it is a portrait of a **morally compromised** God. It is perilously close to **child abuse in heaven**, and it may deform our moral imagination on earth." 9)

"We do not **live** in sin; we are not **born** in sin; we do not need **baptism** to wash away some stain of original sin; we are not depraved creatures who cannot be saved without baptism. Rather, we **emerged** through a long evolutionary process, and we are **still** in it. Our **fallibility** is a **sign** of the burdens we carry as survivors of that long, hard past. ... Therefore the notion of a **savior** to restore us to a pre-fall state is a superstition **before Darwin** and **nonsense after** Darwin." 10)

"Religious leaders, operating under the unchallenged hypothesis that human life is **corrupt** and estranged from God's grace, built a system in which people must constantly **plead** for **punishment**, rescue, redemption, atonement. ... Bluntly, human beings were **indoctrinated** to see themselves as children deserving of God's **wrath**. ... **Guilt-mongering** is essential to maintaining institutional power. Once people accept the diagnosis that they are **fallen sinners**, the church begins persuading them that **forgiveness** is possible **only** through channels of grace the church itself controls. ... The **re-enactment** of Jesus' substitutionary death in the Mass weekly reminds sinners that **their** sins exacted the price. One cannot overstate how much **Catholicism** [indeed, **all** religion — author's note] has exploited **systematic guilt**." 11)

An omniscient, omnipotent being who can **count the hairs** on our heads (Matt 10:30; Luke 12:7) and knows the **secrets of the heart** (Ps 44:21) must have a **sovereign plan** and foresee fully how every being will act. If our actions unfold according to a plan God has laid down in advance, then no matter how evil a person's deeds, he **cannot** be liable to judgment. Yet after saddling humanity with original sin for Adam and Eve's sake—and after granting us the benefit of Jesus' **substitutionary death**—religion now claims that we have **free will** and must bear responsibility for what we do with it. This **diminishes** or **unravels** divine omniscience. From religions that front such a being, we can expect little beyond **buttressing** the **legal order** on which the ruling classes depend.

Sources

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