

The Rise of Humanity

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In this essay I will argue that the fall of man is not the myth of a great tragedy but of the greatest gift bestowed to humans: freedom. I will begin by briefly recounting the myth of the fall of man, as it is told in the book Genesis of the bible. I will then reject the common interpretation that the snake was wrong in telling Eve the truth. Instead I will argue that only due to the snake could Adam and Eve gain their freedom and that it was indeed God's will that Adam and Eve should be free.

Before I recount the myth of the fall of man, I want to stress that I am not a theologian, but a philosopher. In the fall of man I see primarily not a religious recounting, but a myth that may or may not be older than Judaism and Christianity. Same as the myth of the Odyssey gives us insights into human nature, so does the myth of the fall of man. Furthermore, because I primarily consider the fall of man to be a myth, and only secondarily a religious recounting, I can prevent a deeper discussion about the problem of theodicy. For sake of simplicity I will assume that God is a good and just being.

The myth of the fall of man

The myth of the fall of man is, in the western world, somewhat common knowledge. Still I will recount it here, to remind those of us who never heard of it, or forgot about it. In the book Genesis of the bible it is told about the great tragedy of humanity, the fall of man. Before the fall, Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, a place filled with abundance. God allowed Adam and Eve to eat from all trees in the garden save on: the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For if they ate from the tree, they would die (*Die Bibel: Einheitsübersetzung Altes Und Neues Testament* 2016, Gen 2:16-17). At first, Adam and Eve obeyed God's rule. It was the snake, a creature "more cunning than all other animals of the field" (Gen 3:1), that told Eve

that God lied to them and instead of dying, they would “become like God and know about good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Adam and Eve ate from the tree and realized “that they were naked” (Gen 3:7). When God learned about their sin, he expelled them from the Garden of Eden and thereby condemned them to a mortal life of suffering (Gen 3:23).

In this essay, I will refer to the Garden of Eden as “the garden” and the tree of knowledge of good and evil as “the tree”.

The fall of man is considered a great tragedy, because it was the original sin, the first sin committed by humans, which from then on stained all human beings. Ecclesiasticus said that “sin began with a woman, and we must all die because of her” (Sir 25:24), while in the Wisdom of Solomon it is written that “God created man for incorruption [...] but death entered the world by the envy of the devil” (Weish 2:23–24). If humans before the fall were without sin, but due to the fall became sinners, then the fall of man was the greatest tragedy of them all. In other words: *that the snake persuaded Eve to eat from the tree was bad, because it expelled them from the garden*. I will refer to this as the “common interpretation”.

I will subsequently argue that the common interpretation is wrong in seeing Adam and Eve’s expelling from the garden as bad. Instead I will argue that the snake did good in telling Eve about the true consequences that the eating fruits of the tree would result in. Ultimately I will argue that, because God is good and just, he must have foreseen this outcome and that by placing the tree and the cunning snake together in the garden, he must have intended Adam and Eve to be free.

The good deed of the snake

In following the common interpretation, the snake must be seen as the great deceiver. It is she alone that told Eve about the truth and, because Adam and Eve got expelled from the garden and all humans became mortal, she did a great wrong. If we follow the modern notion brought forward by transhumanists and posthumanists alike, mortality is a great evil. If the snake didn’t persuade Eve, we would still live forever, in a place of abundance. We wouldn’t have to work for a living and could enjoy every moment. It seems clear, therefore, that the common interpretation is right in calling the snakes’ actions bad.

I will now argue that the snake’s actions were good, because to know why to follow a rule is better than blindly following it. Remember that God allowed them to eat the fruits of all trees of

the garden, save those from the tree. Adam and Eve had to obey one rule, which God explained to them thus: if they ate from the tree, they would die. Technically speaking, God told the truth. When they did eat from the tree, God expelled them from the garden and condemned them to mortality. But was God right in hiding his true reason?

Imagine dating a person that tells you that they can't invite you back to their place, because if they did, you two would break up. The break up, figuratively speaking, is the death that God warned Adam and Eve of. Now consider that the true reason your date had you obey to this rule, was because they already had a partner and kids at home and you coming back to their place would result in a rather awkward situation that would lead to a break up. Technically speaking, your date was right in the described consequences. But was it right of your date to hide the truth from you? Would you have acted differently if you knew that your date already had a family at home? If you didn't know the real reason, but followed the rule anyway, would you say that you acted freely? This might sound like a strange question. After all you did act freely in obeying the rule, because you could have, even without knowing the rule's true reason, decide to break the rule. Yet there seems to me to be a difference in intentionally following and intentionally breaking a rule. I can break a rule I don't understand and still be called "acting freely". But can the same be said when I follow a rule I don't understand? Am I not acting "in accordance to the rule"? Doesn't the fact that I follow the rule, without knowing about the true reason, make me a puppet, figuratively speaking? Would we consider a computer that follows fixed instructions free? Mustn't there be more to it than following orders, to be considered free? Something like "know why" we have to act in a particular way? Knowing *why* I have to follow that rule? If you knew that your date was (questionably - considering that she is your date) happily married, would you have acted the same way? The same goes for Adam and Eve. We could imagine that they, had they known what eating the fruits of the tree would do have resulted in, would have refrained from eating the fruits. But because they lacked knowledge about why to follow the rule, they weren't free in following it. Instead they were forced to rely on God's better judgment. Because the knowledge would have given them the ability to decide, freely and for themselves, whether or not to eat the fruits. Due to this it can be said that they would have enjoyed greater freedom. And because having more freedom is better than having less freedom, enjoying greater freedom is a good thing. Because it is a good thing, it seems that the fact that the snake persuaded Eve to eat from the tree, *by letting her know about the consequences of eating the fruits*, is a good thing. Therefore the common interpretation

seems to be wrong in saying that the snake's telling Eve was wrong.

If the snake did good in persuading Eve to eat from the tree, it must follow that the fall of man wasn't a bad thing after all. Still, one could argue that God didn't intend to mislead Adam and Eve. Instead it seems plausible that he realized that telling them the truth about the fruits of the tree would tempt them even more to eat them. Therefore he invented a "white lie", same as parents do with their children when asked difficult questions like the origins of Santa Claus or the Christkind, or where babies come from.

Lies, Love and Freedom

I will now present an argument that proves that "white lies", even when told with good intentions, are bad, because they can limit a persons' freedom. Imagine a teenage girl that recently got her first boyfriend¹. Her mother, realizing the dangers involved in this delicate matter, decides to give her daughter "the talk". We imagine, for sake of simplicity, that her daughter didn't already gain more than enough information about sex through the internet, school and peers. Because her mother is afraid of her daughter becoming pregnant or getting infected with sexual transmitted diseases, she is also afraid of telling her daughter the truth about sexual intercourse. Telling her about sexual intercourse, she fears, would make her daughter even more curious to try it out. Therefore she invents a "white lie" and tells her daughter that when cuddling naked with her new boyfriend, not to make navel-on-navel contact, because that is how babies are made. Curiously the mother is quite inventive and calls this "navel-on-navel-course". Her hope is that, when her daughter and her new boyfriend find themselves in this situation, her daughter assumes the touching of their navels to be significant and is at worst most curious how it feels like and gives no second thought to their genitals. Would we say that the mother acted rightly? Would we say that the no-navel-on-navel-course rule is a good rule? After all, we could say that by inventing this rule, she deflects the attention of her curious teenage daughter to some harmless experience. If we assumed her daughter most innocent and obedient, we can assume that she would from then on try to prevent navel-on-navel-course. Because she tries not to get naked together with her boyfriend and having their navels touch, she isn't in danger of accidentally learning the truth. Because it seems plausible

¹This analogy works with every imaginable combination of sexes and sexual orientations. At least the STD-part holds true, because the concern for unwanted pregnancies vanishes in certain combinations. Still we could imagine that the mother is concerned about her teenager's mental well being and thinks that the time for the "real thing" has not yet come.

that, assuming that navel-on-navel-course is happening, it is only a small step to the “real thing”. Therefore the concerned mothers’ rule seems good, although it is a lie. Similarly we can imagine God in the myth of the fall of man to try to prevent Adam and Eve from getting expelled from the garden by scaring them away from the tree. But I think that it is not a good rule, because good rules are followed by one’s own free will, whereas to follow a rule for a different reason than it was intended to be followed for, is insincere and therefore bad.

It seems indisputable that being chained to a wall, with no ability to move away, is a bad thing. No one wants to lack their freedom and being chained to a wall is one sure way to lose one’s freedom. From the various attempts of prison breaks in the past we can see that people, once they lost their freedom, try to regain it. Freedom, it seems, is a good thing that we desire most above all else, while being unfree is bad.

But what freedom are we talking about in the case of the concerned mother, and analogously God? Freedom comes in different shapes and sizes. There is what I will call *physical, bodily or outer freedom*. It is the most direct and simplest form of freedom, because it boils down to an either-or question: Either you are bodily free or you are not. Either someone locks you into their basement with no possibility of leaving it, or you are not locked away. Either someone decided to make you their slave and forces you to obey their orders, or nobody does so. Another form of freedom is *psychological or inner freedom*. This freedom is more complex, because it comes in various degrees. Societal norms and rules all restrict inner freedom. To not punch someone, whose face is particularly displeasing to you, on the nose, is an indisputably good norm that limits your freedom. Sometimes we all have bad days and besides feeling (and looking) like crap, it would be most unfortunate if we got repeatedly punched for it, too. What is difficult about inner freedom is that, while it concerns your behavior and your thinking, in many cases it originates from the outside. From a young age we are told to be kind to others, not to fight, not to lie etc. These rules slowly become a part of our thinking and limit our inner freedom by making the possible impossible. If you grow up thinking that life’s goal is to make as much money as possible and to spend as much time on your job as possible, the idea that this might not be such a smart idea after all will not, on its own, cross your mind. To think this thought has become not only an impossibility, but the impossibility of an impossibility, because if it were a mere impossibility, it were still possible to reach the conclusion that there are more important things than making money. You could simply play around with your thoughts until you reached their negation. Instead, there is a hole without the trace of a hole, where this

thought would have resided in, had it been thinkable. Inner freedom, therefore, is a different beast from bodily freedom. While for you to lose your bodily freedom requires someone else forcefully take it from you, no one can take away your inner freedom, because only you can remove the possibility of the possible. As long as you believe in the possibility of an idea, it will continue to exist. As soon as you renounce this thought, the possible will become the impossible impossibility.

It is without a doubt that to brainwash someone, and thereby limiting their inner freedom, is a bad thing. To be free means, simply put, to-be-able-to: to be able to move, to say something, to think a thought. To be unfree, conversely, means the opposite. No one, I most boldly assume, wants to lose their outer freedom. For most of us, force is necessary to wrestle it from us. Yet, when we are losing our inner freedom, we don't fight or struggle against it. I think that, because only we ourselves can limit our inner freedom, the restriction doesn't seem as bad as our loss of physical freedom. Seneca reminds us how often we freely give up our freedom, without giving a second thought about it. While people refuse to give up their homes and are always ready to take up arms to defend them against intruders, they are more than willing to put their lives in the service of others (Seneca 2010, 122–23). "There is nobody", he writes, "that wants to give away his money; his own life, on the other hand, to oh how many people everybody is giving it away to!"² (p. 123). It is curious that we find it so easy to trade in our inner freedom. Is it because we cannot track it, that it loses its value? It seems similar to cashless payments, which make us lose the sense of the money we are giving away. As long as we hold it in our hands, it exists for us. But as soon as it becomes a number on a screen, its reality, and therefore its value, vanishes. The volatile nature of our inner freedom should make us even more careful to protect it. But the opposite seems to be the case.

While it is unarguably bad to lose one's bodily freedom, it is even worse to lose our inner freedom, because by losing it we give up not only the impossibility to think a thought, but the impossibility of its impossibility. Thought itself becomes unthinkable. It vanishes without a trace. To regain your physical freedom, you have to break the chains that hold you down. But to regain your inner freedom? This means not only to break through your inner chains, but to rediscover that which you have lost. It means to think that which has become impossible for you to think.

If losing one's physical freedom is bad, I think it is safe to say that losing one's inner freedom

²"Es findet sich keiner, der sein Geld ausgeben möchte; sein Leben dagegen, unter wie vielen verteilt es ein jeder!"

is even worse. We can imagine a future prison, where felons are no longer locked away behind bars, but instead receive brain implants that change their behavior. Instead of physically limiting their freedom, these chips respond to “criminal” thought patterns and prevent them from happening. Crime, thus, becomes impossible for the criminals. It becomes impossible in a twofold way: physically, because they can no longer act on it, and psychologically, because the idea of crime becomes impossible to think - an impossible impossibility. Although I can imagine the apologetics of technological progress to praise this future, I think that this is an even worse punishment than physical prisons. To alter a person’s behavior by altering their thinking and thus limiting their inner freedom, is way worse, because, in the case of the chip, it might become irreversible. One might argue that in the case of criminals this is not a bad thing, because their “unchecked” behavior threatens the whole society. But where do we draw the line? Talking about molesters and murderers is one thing. But what about a tyrannic government that decides that outlaw any notion of democracy? If to think about democracy becomes a crime, than they could decide to implant a chip preventing the idea of democracy from popping up in our heads into every citizen. Indisputably this would be bad. It is bad because it is not merely a limitation, but the annihilation of thought itself. Thus we must assume that inner freedom takes precedence over bodily freedom, although bodily freedom is necessary in the first place to establish inner freedom - a thesis that space does not permit me to expand on here.

When the concerned mother tells her daughter to refrain from navel-on-navel-course, she limits her daughters’ inner freedom. She doesn’t simply put a physical lock on her daughter, instead she forms her daughter’s thinking by removing the possibility of the idea of sexual intercourse and instead introducing the idea of navel-on-navel-course. When her daughter, being an obedient child, follows her mothers rule, she does so not out of a free will. To her thinking, she understands the rule and thus wants to be a good girl and not come near the forbidden navel of her boyfriend. In reality she obeys to her mother’s “white lie”, and being deceived by it, she acts for reasons that are not her own. If her mother were to tell her about sexual intercourse instead, she could make up her mind and find her own stance on the problem. She might realize the dangers involved in getting pregnant at her age, or decide that STD’s are not worth the hassle. Instead her thinking is imprisoned by following her mother’s “white lie”. We could argue that we can forgive the mother’s “white lie”, because she had her daughter’s best interests in mind. Or did she? Because if she had her best interests in mind, the mother would

surely have realized that freedom stands on top of that list. There might be danger in freedom, but an act done out of a free will is better than an act done out of restricted knowledge. Had God told Adam and Eve about the consequences of eating from the tree, they would have been able to consider them and the words of the snake would have lost their appeal. Instead God opted for a “white lie” and thus became a tyrant of their minds by annihilating thought. When the snake told Eve the truth, she not only stated a fact, but also freed both Eve and Adam from their mental prison. She gave them freedom to act freely and not out of God’s will.

If we return to the objection of this section, that it was wrong of the snake to tell Eve the truth and thus get Adam and Eve expelled from a place of abundance and immortality, we have to consider the worth of freedom against the things Adam and Eve would have enjoyed in the garden. Is abundance better than freedom? Is the life of an immortal slave better than the life of a mortal, but free, human being? I think that freedom takes precedence over everything else. What good would it be to be immortal but lack freedom? It would be a miserable, never ending, existence. All the abundance of the world couldn’t make up for it. Only pure hedonists would opt for a world filled with abundance that lacks freedom. I don’t think that we should think this option viable. It is better to be free and experience lack, than it is to experience the opposite. Realizing that you lack something is better than lacking something and not even realizing that you do so. Therefore the snake did Adam and Eve a great deed by giving them inner freedom. She did not condemn them to lives of mortal misery, but instead gifted them with freedom.

God’s foresight

There is but one question that needs to be asked now: If God is almighty, good, just and wise, how was it possible that he placed the tree and the cunning snake in one and the same place? Could he not build a giant electric fence around the tree? God being god and Adam and Eve being oblivious to electricity, this would have surely prevent them from coming near the tree. Or was it too much to ask to place the snake in an unreachable pit or expel it from the garden in the first place? Did he not foresee what would happen?

I think that the claim that God is almighty does not conflict with his decision to place the tree and the cunning snake in one and the same place. Instead I will argue that it was God’s plan all along to have both in place so that Adam and Eve could gain their *original freedom*. Thus I will directly oppose the christian notion of original sin.

Although I said in the beginning that I would not talk about the problem of theodicy, I will still place my toe in its most shallow water. According to the common interpretation, God told Adam and Eve that eating from the tree would cause them to die. This, as I argued above, was a lie. A “white lie”, but a lie none the less. It might be better than telling them a blatant, one could argue, but it would still not be the whole truth. If someone tells not the whole truth, but only a part of it, he tells partly a lie. Therefore, God lied to Adam and Eve, albeit only partly.

But given that God is almighty, just, good and wise, how can it be that he told Adam and Eve partly a lie? Even more, by telling precisely this lie, he placed a rule on Adam and Eve that restricted their inner freedom by limiting their thinking. He created a false truth in their heads that, from then on, guided their thinking. But how is it possible that God did that? Would this not imply that God is not good, because telling a lie and thus restricting someone’s inner freedom is bad? Or did he not foresee what would happen, which would make him anything but almighty? Can we accept this conclusion and instead think of God as not almighty, not good etc.?

Having argued that Adam and Eve gained freedom by learning about the truth, I think that we should dismiss the idea that God is anything by almighty, good etc. Instead we have to conclude that he was aware of what would happen, when he placed the tree together with the cunning snake in the garden. He must have been aware that telling when Adam and Eve the truth, they would not have been tempted by the snake to eat the forbidden fruit, for they would have realized that being expelled from the garden wasn’t worth the hassle. Instead he set it up in a way that allowed for Adam and Eve to “accidentally” stumble upon the truth and thus gain their original freedom. One might ask at that point, why God didn’t gift them with freedom in the first place. Why did he place them in the garden first and expelled them when they gained their original freedom? I think that, given that I consider the mythological aspect of the fall of man, it should signify that humans weren’t born with freedom, but instead had to gain it. If humans were born with freedom, it would be impossible to take it from them. But there is nothing that stops someone from throwing newborns directly into prison. Same as there is nothing that prevents someone from brainwashing entire generations and thus severely limiting their freedom. Freedom is an achievement of humanity, which is why I think that the title “the fall of man” is badly chosen. It was not a great sin that the snake told Eve and that Eve “persuaded” Adam. Instead it was its greatest deed, because it helped Adam and Eve gain their freedom. Thus, instead of “the fall of man”, I propose to call it “the rise of man”.

Conclusion

In this essay I argued that the myth of “the fall of man”, as told in the bible, is in truth a myth of freedom. I argued that what the snake did in telling Eve the truth, was not a great tragedy to humanity, but a great deed. It helped them gain their “original freedom”, which I see as directly opposing the notion of original sin. Then I argued that God, being almighty, good, just and wise, was aware of what would happen and thus refrained from keeping Adam and Eve away from the tree. This myth, I finally argue, signifies that freedom is not something humans are born with, but has to be won.

References

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