When deviance becomes sin

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Abstract

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In this article a brief exposition is given of what sin and deviance entail. This perspective is approached in terms of what is called the logovision premise. This premise essentially maintains that human perception of reality is primarily mediated through words and that only God's words allow us to see reality as it truly is.

Thus we are enabled to respond appropriately to reality – especially evaluative reality. By then applying God's words to the issues involved in the study of deviance, more clarity is hopefully achieved. This is done by discussing the respective characteristics of sin and deviance and by briefly exploring the relationship between these two phenomena. Finally some of the implications for the study of social deviance are discussed.

1. Introduction

Accepting the category of *sin* as ontologically real, is of course only possible if one accepts the Christian worldview, as presented in the Bible, as valid. This will be my point of departure in discussing the topic "When deviance becomes sin".

Another important premise from which this theme will be discussed, will be called the *logovision* (from the words *logos* and *vision*) premise and can be summarized in five statements:

- *We look at reality with our eyes but we see reality through words.* This is a very simple but profound truth that has been captured long ago in Walter Lipman's aphorism: "First we look, then we name and only then we see" (Bredemeier & Stephenson, 1962:2).

- *What we thus see in reality, is – if we believe the words applied to that reality – taken by us as basis for our reaction or response to that reality.*

- *If deceptive words about reality were used and we believed those words, we would not see reality as it really is, i.e. true reality, but we would take the false reality to be the true reality.*

- *If we have thus been successfully deceived, i.e. convinced to believe the false reality (lie) to be the true reality (truth) our response to that reality could be fatally inappropriate.* For example, if A wanted to kill B, A could simply invite B to have a can of Coke after having added poison in the can but without having changed the word "Coke" on the can to the word "Poison". B would then *see* a can of Coke on the basis of having *believed the word* "Coke" written on the tin and would inappropriately respond by drinking the "Coke" and die – having taken a false reality (a lie) to be the true reality (truth) and having done so with fatal consequences.

- *As Ultimate Definitional Authority, God's Words about reality – be it physical, psychological, socio-cultural or spiritual reality – are the words that, if accepted and believed, can guide human words and systems of words – also social scientific words and word systems – as well as human actions, towards a much closer encounter with truth than would otherwise have been humanly possible.*

Against the backdrop of these remarks, then, this article is written with the primary aim of bringing more clarity in the evaluative confusion which is characteristic of the study of social deviance and which in this article is seen as the result of unsuccessful attempts at evading inescapable evaluative issues. It is attempted to obtain more clarity by bringing God's words to bear on the confusion in the study of deviance so as to attempt to see the realities concerning deviance, more clearly. This is done by distinguishing between sin and social deviance and by relating these phenomena to each other.

2. On good and evil

Cherbonnier starts his discussion on the interconnectedness between sin and the evaluative issues of good and evil as follows:

> Anyone who uses the word 'sin' obviously assumes a distinction between good and evil. But leaders of thought, both scientific and philosophic have frequently challenged this distinction. A discussion of sin must therefore first deal with the question of whether in the last analysis, the difference between good and evil is tenable or whether it is merely a subjective phenomenon which a man of intelligence can overcome. If it can be successfully suppressed, then all talk about sin becomes a dead issue. But if not, then sin at once becomes everybody's problem. *He who wishes to avoid this problem correctly*

concentrates his fire upon value judgments (Cherbonnier, 1956:21; emphasis – AS.)

Also Berkouwer (1958:5) acknowledges this connection between sin and issues of good and evil when he says:

> Deze vraag ... (naar de *oorsprong* der zonde) ... die men binnen de grenzen van kerk en theologie allerwegen aantreft, schijnt haar parallel te vinden in een algemene bezinning over de oorsprong van 'het kwaad' in de wereld.

The same interconnectedness is also emphasized by Moller (1997:4, 5, 6, 8, 31). In the following few paragraphs I will expand on this issue.

Underlying every human being's and therefore every social scientist's cognitive, emotional and volitional faculties, is the even more fundamental, evaluative capacity – i.e. the formal capacity or dynamism which enables human beings to *differentiate* between good and evil or right and wrong. Of course the *definitional content* of the terms good and evil or right and wrong is to some extent culturally influenced. However, in the final analysis, the definitional content of these evaluative opposites is determined by the particular individual's free choice of an *ultimate directional source* or an *ultimate definitional authority* – be it him- or herself, be it some other human being or beings, be it a particular philosophy, or ideology, or be it a supernatural source e.g. God, Satan or other spirit beings. The chosen *ultimate definitional authority* becomes god/God to that person. The definitional content given or derived from the chosen *ultimate definitional authority*, will therefore not only be accepted by the particular actor, but the evaluative behavioural directives (values) flowing from this authoritative source, will also be freely obeyed.

It is important and very interesting to note that this evaluative capacity does not lie dormantly within us waiting to be activated only when we so desire. In actual fact, we can neither escape the continuous working of this capacity nor the continuous responsibility and accountability that goes along with the inevitable choices between good and evil we continuously make.

Even if we tried to escape from our evaluative capacities by professing evaluative neutrality or simply by remaining silent, our professed neutrality or silence will not only always be taken by a particular audience to signify – even if only by implication – approval of the phenomenon under scrutiny, but will in fact involve that approval. We therefore always make and convey evaluative statements – even if only by default. If a social scientist were to try to break loose from this tenacious evaluative responsibility by stating: "It is wrong *to be evaluatively involved as a social scientist*" or "It is right *to be evaluatively neutral*" he or she would paradoxically still be making, and in fact would already have made an evaluative statement.

Cherbonnier (1956:21) discusses a number of futile attempts to escape value judgments of which Nietzche's attempt is perhaps the most illustrative of the futility and failure of such attempts at evaluative beyondism and which suggest that they are in principle impossible.

> No one can censor the word 'good' and 'evil' without introducing some substitute for them, and no one can put them in quarantine without pre-supposing them. Even the legitimate suspension of value judgments for purposes of scientific investigation occurs within the total context of valuation. The scientist must first decide that it is 'good' to seek objective truth. To make the further decision that it would be even 'better' to dispense completely with the terms 'good' and 'evil' would repudiate the basis of the decision itself. It is therefore not surprising that everyone who attempts to banish these terms becomes the victims of a curious irony.

In his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche (1956:23) failed to break free from making evaluative statements. Cherbonnier (1956:23) remarks in this regard: "The irony of his (Nietzsche's) position however, consists in his denunciation of value judgments, together with those who make them, as themselves *wicked*."

The scientific commandment, *"Thou shalt not commit a value judgment"* – so eloquently opposed by Gouldner (in Finsterbusch & McKenna, 1986:15) is therefore a commandment to remain evaluatively silent and passive and in effect implies the following: "Thou shalt not disapprove of or in any way act against any behaviour (sociologically defined 'sins' like racism, sexism and classism excluded of course). *By thy silence and inaction thou shalt be taken to be – or preferably, though shalt be – an agent of the universal condonation of human behaviour in the name of social science* (once again of course excluding the trilogy of "sociological sins" of racism, sexism and classism). If saying "yes" to evil, or consciously remaining silent about it while being aware of its existence, involves condoning that wrong, then saying "no" to evil, automatically becomes one of the most powerful statements any human being can make.

To summarize: All human beings – and therefore all social scientists – are born with an evaluative *capacity to differentiate* between good and evil; possess the *ability and freedom to define the contents* of good and evil in terms of a chosen *directional source* or *ultimate definitional authority*; are *free to choose or decide* between these evaluative opposites – once again in terms of a chosen directional source or ultimate definitional authority and finally, are *responsible* for the actions flowing from their choice. Furthermore, human beings – and hence social scientists too – cannot break free from this evaluative capacity or the responsibility and accountability that goes along with it. We *are* therefore inescapably, evaluatively responsible and accountable for what we say and do, not by choice but because that is *part of our being* as humans. We *are*, however, also free to choose who or what we will accept and obey as *ultimate definitional*

authority in our lives and work. In view of the varying and even contradictory definitions of what constitutes good and the varying and often contradictory definitions of what constitutes evil, the following question inevitably arises: "Which then is the truly good and which the truly evil?" There has to be a single answer to a question like this as two mutually exclusive and opposite answers cannot both simultaneously be valid and apply to a particular case and in particular circumstances. *We therefore have no choice but to choose.* As a result we as human beings carry a threefold burden in this regard:

* Firstly, the burden of defining good and evil, or our *definitional burden or responsibility,* which requires us to search the minefield of distorted and deceptive definitions of good and evil for the true good and the true evil and to distinguish these from the false good and the false evil respectively.

* Secondly, the *burden of choice, or our decisional responsibility,* which requires us to take a stand on these evaluative opposites amidst powerful contradicting pressures impinging on our attempt to make the right choice.

* Thirdly, the *burden of accountability or our admissional responsibility (i.e. the act of accepting or acknowledging as true)* which requires us to accept responsibility for our choices and the associated actions and to explain and justify these actions we perform when asked to account for them.

3. On deviance

3.1 Deviance and evaluative issues

When social scientists study the phenomenon of social deviance they are in terms of the above therefore subject to conflicting forces: One the one hand the scientific commandment of value or ethical neutrality and on the other hand the inevitability of being evaluatively responsible and accountable. In a futile attempt to give precedence to the former, they often respond as follows: Instead of calling certain forms of behaviour bad, wrong or evil, they opt for ostensibly more neutral or scientific sounding terms like 'deviant', 'pathological', 'disorganized' etc. "Good" behaviour is then referred to as for example 'conforming' 'normal' or 'healthy' and 'organized' behaviour. Lyman (1978: 129) remarks in this regard:

> Through the bloodless language of the new sciences the sins are neutralized: Sloth becomes 'affectlessness'; lust changes to 'sexual deviance'; envy shows up as 'resentment'; greed reforms itself as the 'spirit of capitalism'; gluttony fades into 'addiction', and pride is reduced to 'mental illness'. Anger, however, resists the expurgations of scientific and lexical sublimation; typically, we find it characterized as 'aggression'.

A sinister and dangerous dynamic, however, is operating within and underlying this whole process and that is what could be called the dynamic of the *polar transpositioning of evaluative opposites*. This involves the tendency towards calling good "evil" and calling evil "good" so as to get people, in terms of *logovision premise* – whether they are God's children or not – to see a false reality as though it were the true reality in order to get them to act in a fatally inappropriate manner. The *polar transpositioning of evaluative opposites* normally manifests itself in the following three phases and /or dimensions:

The *first phase* very often simply involves a questioning of the validity of the distinction between good and evil, light and darkness, truth and lie, love and hate, in a particular case which at the same time represents a symbolic questioning of the generic validity of the distinction between evaluative opposites in all similar cases. It invariably takes the form of the questioning, discrediting, debunking, incredulizing and attacking the "good" pole of the evaluative continuum. Questions like the following are examples of this: "*Can we really know what is good, what is right, what is truth, what is light, what is love?*" Eventually God becomes the target of this process as is indicated by the following question which Möller (1997:10) sees as manifestation of the destructive dynamic of sin: "How do we know whether God is not perhaps evil rather than good, and whether He is not perhaps seeking our doom instead of our salvation or survival?"

Implied in questions like these is the suggestion that what is called "good/right/ truth/light/love" is not nearly as distinct and different from its evaluative opposites as we might think. Strangely, nobody seems to have a problem to recognize and acknowledge the distinct characteristics of the evaluative opposites of evil, wrong, the lie, darkness, and hate.

The *second phase* frequently amounts to an attempt to diminish the distance between or blur the clarity of the distinction between good and evil by emphasizing apparent commonalities between the evaluative opposites and then concluding with the question: "*Are these apparent opposites really so different?*" – thus in effect making evil less objectionable and good less attractive. This dynamic is very often observable in televised situational comedies.

Thirdly and finally, a transpositioning of evaluative opposites very often occurs where – and here the evil pole of the continuum receives the emphasis and becomes the benefactor – evil is being called good, particularly by means of the names given to it. Thus, for instance, crime can became "innovation"; adultery "swinging", prostitution "sexual therapy" or "commercial sex work", theft "redistribution of wealth", etc. Taken to its logical extreme, this phase tends to find its conclusion in calling God Satan and calling Satan God. Interestingly enough, this is exactly what Satan implied when he tried to convince Eve to

obey him rather than God. The dire consequences of this is to be found in the behavioural correlates which go with this polar transpositioning – i.e. the growing tolerance and approval of and eventual participation in activities like these by increasing numbers of people. In this way, the gradual and incremental and almost unnoticeable institutionalization of evil/wrong/darkness/the lie/hate takes effect. Being death-directed, this process, which is always Satan-driven through the degenerative dynamic of sin,

> ... (is) geared at spoiling and ultimately destroying that which God has made. It strives to convert all that is beautiful to ugly, good to bad, true to false and to kill that which lives. Everything was created to the glory of God and with the purpose of exalting Him, but sin aims to reverse this trend, turning everything against God and making it a disgrace. Consequently sin always blasphemes God [Isa. 25:5; 1 Pet. 4:4, 14] (Möller, 1997:10).

Unless reversed – which has of course in principle already been done two thousand years ago, in and through Christ Jesus – this process inevitably would have to result in the ultimate destruction of humanity and society and everything else that exists.

Nevertheless, whatever one calls deviance, it is always implicitly suggested to be the kind of behaviour to be avoided, because it is considered 'bad', whereas the opposite category (i.e. conformity) is implicitly suggested to be the kind of behaviour to be espoused, because it is considered 'good'. Students and other audiences reading works on social deviance or listening to talks on this subject, implicitly accept this evaluative differentiation, not only to be valid, but moreover, almost invariably take the evaluative behavioural directives, implied in theories of deviance, as guidelines for their own behaviour.

A very clear illustration that even sociologists tend to do this, can be found in the following remark by Alex Thio on Glaser's theory of differential identification concerning criminality: "Glaser's theory may be taken to suggest that it is all right for us to associate with criminals in real life or in books and movies, as long as we do not take them so seriously that we identify with them, treating them as our heroes. If we do identify with them, we are likely to become criminals ourselves" (Thio, 1995:35).

As social scientific human beings, sociologists (and most probably all other students of human behaviour as well) therefore have to deal with two types of knowledge concerning the social reality they study. The one type is informative or categorical knowledge which is always and in all contexts, in a very explicit sense, present and operating in all human behaviour. A pilot, hunter or foodgatherer respectively has to be in possession of and act in accordance with very distinctive sets of informative knowledge in order to fly a plane successfully, track down and kill some animal and find food in the fields necessary for survival. In the same way sociologists make use of informative

knowledge when – among others things – they differentiate between deviant and conforming behaviour and the characteristics of each.

The other more implicit type of knowledge, which is more fundamental than the first, and furthermore inseparably linked to the first, is of course evaluative or normative knowledge. Evaluative knowledge is nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of good and evil, which infuses and directs our informative knowledge.

With reference to the examples used above, evaluative knowledge actually precedes and in fact constitutes the foundation on the basis upon which the categorical information is considered to be of value. *Because* flying per se, flying as a means of rapid transport, safe flying etc. *are defined as good* (i.e. evaluative knowledge) *therefore* the *knowledge* to build safe and fast planes, the skills to fly these planes successfully, etc. (categorical knowledge), *becomes valued*. The same line of argumentation applies to the other two and similar examples.

Applied to the sociological study of the field of social deviance, it therefore becomes possible to construct a typology, which relates the above-mentioned types of knowledge in this particular context. Such a typology would look like this.

Sociological (categorical)
definitions of

		Conformity	Deviance
Evaluative definitions of	**Good**	Good Conformity	Good Deviance
	Evil	Evil Conformity	Evil Deviance

A very simple, yet fundamental, truth emerges from this typology, namely that it is possible to differentiate between good deviance and evil or bad deviance on the one hand, as well as between good conformity and evil or bad conformity on the other hand. This differentiation – although found to be highly disturbing and unacceptable by some sociologists, e.g. Rushing and Sagarin (in Thio, 1995:5) – is not only logically appealing but also empirically convincing in the sense that all social scientists would acknowledge that not all forms of deviant behaviour

are necessarily bad – e.g. deviating from a peer group norm which requires the use of drugs – nor that all forms of conformity are necessarily good – e.g. conforming to the dictates of a totalitarian, ethnocentric and racist leader.

Despite the logically and empirically compelling nature of this argument in support of two interlocking and inseparable types of knowledge, sociologist as we have seen, are expected by some to achieve the impossible and that is to study, research and teach sociology in general – and the sociology of deviance in particular – as if evaluative knowledge did not exist. In trying to accomplish the impossible, many if not most sociologists, try to ignore, devaluate or suppress the existence and inescapable relevance of evaluative knowledge. This of course cannot successfully be achieved as our every thought, word and deed is preceded by and intended to satisfy a particular evaluative standard, underlying that particular thought, word or deed. Instead then of confronting and integrating these two levels of knowledge in an accountable manner, most sociologists opt for the easier but inadequate response to this inescapable dilemma, by simply using the term deviant behaviour to refer to all kinds of behaviour considered to be undesirable – i.e. behaviour which would otherwise have been called bad or evil by whoever happens to be the selected definitional authority at the time, be it public opinion, the people, the workers, the government, the middle class, business, society etc.

Furthermore, they tend simply to substitute the term conformity for behaviour that would otherwise be called good or right by a similarly selected definitional authority. Implicitly then deviant behaviour becomes a synonym for bad/evil behaviour and comforming behaviour a synonym for good/right behaviour.

Our evaluative capacity as human beings thus poses an uncomfortable challenge to us which is in fact perceived by some to be some sort of threat from which one should rather try to escape. In terms of the above, three escape routes can thus be identified.

The first way of "escaping" our evaluative capability is therefore to avoid using the terms "good" and "evil" or "right" and "wrong" at all and to substitute these with terms like "conforming" and "deviant behaviour" respectively – i.e. to opt for "ethically neutral objectivity". Yet, as we have seen, we still end up with the problem that not all deviant behaviour can always be considered "bad" or "evil". Many sociologists, however, evade this problem by denying the possibility of "good" deviant behaviour by calling such a possibilty an "oxymoron". Thio (1995:5) refers to Sagarin in this regard: "Sagarin also insists that deviance be defined as negative only, arguing that it is an oxymoron – a contradiction in terms – to talk about 'positive deviance'". William Rushing basically shares the same conviction (in Thio, 1995:5).

The logical problem that we are left with in using our substitutionary terms, is the following: How can good behaviour (i.e. conformity) at the same time also be bad and how can bad behaviour (i.e. deviance) at the same time also be good?

With twisted, relativistic reasoning, we could of course deceive ourselves to believe that what is considered "good" in our society might be considered "bad or evil" in the next and therefore that the same phenomenon could simultaneously be both good and bad. Yet deep inside, we would know that in terms of some *ultimate criterion* it is impossible for wrong to be really right and for right to be really wrong – that it is impossible for two opposite and mutually exclusive phenomena to be the same and to be grouped together in the same nominal category.

In spite of this, *our second route* of escape then, is taken to be *relativism*. In this case we deny the reality and even possibility that absolutes concerning good and evil exist or could ever exist. Once we truly believe this, we conclude that it is not only impossible but also not rational or desirable to bother about issues like these. The behavioural directive following from this line of argument is simply "Do as you please – as there are no evaluative absolutes on right and wrong anyway: therefore anything goes".

Our *third route of escape is determinism*. In this case the source of our actions is shifted from the realm of conscious and voluntary choice to dynamisms (structures/processes/forces) within ourselves or outside ourselves or at least outside our control. The old nature vs. nurture debate testifies to this. Through this approach then, we shift responsibility or blame for our actions or inaction to forces within or outside ourselves and in so doing we furthermore present these dynamisms as coercive entities which allow us *no choice in what we do, no control over what we do and finally, as a result of the first two, no responsibility for what we do.* Thus, once again no one could ever point a finger to us (or to any other human being for that matter) and say: "You're responsible".

Lyman (1978:119) notes in this regard:

> The rise and proliferation of the sciences of man since the 1850's have been attended by the fall and the contraction of the idea of sin. Perhaps most significant in this movement has been the philosophical victory in the minds of most educated persons, of determinism over freedom. Once man was relieved of full responsibility for his deeds, once dark forces of the mind, of history, of heredity, or of culture were found to shape his thoughts, and shackle his reason, sin with its insistence on freedom of the will to choose between good and evil, had to retreat into the recesses of a suspect theology; at the same time dire punishment as a deserved retribution for the willful commission of wrongful deeds had to give way to remediation and rehabilitation. The establishment of social-scientific determinism paved the way first for a scientific authorization for the distrust of human reason and, ultimately, for the triumph of the therapeutic.

All of the above relieves us of the necessity to find ultimate and valid definitions of good and evil, to choose between the two and to accept responsibility for our choices.

The threats and possible escape routes could be depicted as follows:

Threat	Escape route
Having to find ultimate and valid definitions of good and evil: *Our definitional responsibility*	Ethical neutrality
Having to choose between good and evil: *Our decisional responsibility*	Relativism
Having to accept accountability for our choices and actions: *Our admissional responsibilty*	Determinism

The same escapist dynamic operates within the study of deviance with ethical neutrality, relativism and determinism as the most well-known routes of escape from evaluative responsibility. In spite of this attempt to dodge the evaluative substructure upon which this whole operation rests, it will not go away and will keep on demanding a verdict even if only by default.

3.2 Defining deviance

When trying to define deviance, we can start off by looking at various categories of definitions as identified by Thio (1995:4-8).

Firstly he looks at definitions suggesting that deviance involves *departure from normative standards*. Parsons, Merton and Cohen fall in this category.

Secondly, those definitions – used by most sociologists – which define deviance in terms of *what the public/public opinion considers negative, objectionable* behaviour. Sociologists opting for these definitions, reject the idea that the term deviance could refer to positive of unobjectionable behaviour. Definitions by Rushing and Sagarin fall in this category.

Whereas the first two categories defined deviance on the basis of the actions of the deviant actor, the third category of definitions define deviance on the basis of a responding audience/group/society *imposing a label on behaviour* considered to be undesirable. Becker and Erikson fall in this category.

The fourth category can be called the *ambiguous category* and involves ambiguous definitions. Matza and Lemert belong to this category. In fact Lemert suggests it is much better to leave deviance undefined.

Fifthly and finally, Alexander Liazos suggests that people listed by sociologists as deviant, have one thing in common. They are all oppressed, *powerless individuals* whose deviant behaviour is of a dramatic nature – such as prostitution, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and the like. This means that sociologists have neglected to study the powerful persons who break laws, fix laws, violate moral standards (in Thio, 1995:7).

Thio (1995:8), then reduces these five broad categories of definitions into two – the positivist (including those definitions with a specific focus on definitional precision and a scientific study of powerless deviants) and the humanist (including definitions with a specific focus on broader boundaries, labeling and the study of powerful deviants).

Looking at the variety of definitions of deviant behaviour, one common element connects all these definitions: In each and every definition, *humans are taken as ultimate definitional authority* – be they sociologists, public opinion, powerful members of society etc. Taking this fact as basis, it is possible to define deviance as *that state of being and those behaviours which would constitute a departure from that which humans* (be it humanity in its totality or certain sections of it) *call "good".* Put in other words therefore, deviance simply refers to *that state of being or to that behaviour which humans call "bad" or "evil".*

4. On sin

4.1 Sin and sociology

Concerning sin and sociology, Lyman (1978:3) says the following:

> To the extent that sociological thought embraces the study of evil today, it does so under the embarrassing, neutered morality of 'deviance'. Adopting for the most part an uncritical stance toward the normative structure of any given society, the sociologist of deviance can only locate those violations of the norms that evoke sanctions of one kind or another. Presuming to have no relevant standards of morality by which he might independently judge the situation, the positive sociologist of deviance takes his cue from whatever the forces of law and restriction define as evil. Hence, the concerns of the vocal and powerful elements of a society become the resources for a sociological investigation of evil. Alternatively, the sociologist becomes the self-appointed advocate of an allegedly oppressed group, or of history itself, and seeks to define and locate evil in just those official elements that move against and demoralize his chosen people or trajectory of history. Sociologists are asked to take sides in a kind of intellectual contest of moral and social superiority; in the outcome of that game, there will emerge good and evil.

A good example of this is the book by Finsterbusch and McKenna: *Taking Sides* (1986).

With reference to sin and sociology, Lyman (1978:3-4) says:

> The concept of sin is a rara avis in sociology[1]. Indeed, it is a rare word these days altogether if we except the thundering warnings of religion. It is not that there are no transgressions for which we might atone or repent, but rather that the atomization of society, the alienation characteristic of social relationship, the collectivization of guilt and pride make the designation of sinners all too difficult. There has been a division of labour in sin as well as in virtue, and each person can now point an accusatory finger toward others or toward a faceless massive monolith – the corporate structure of modern society. It is precisely in this recognition of division, corporatism, and neutrality that sin has reached its greatest heights. For modern sin is peculiarly non-human in its use of things and exploitative in its use of men. Just as man reaches new understandings of human nature and social order, those very understandings lead him to see evil as outside his control. It is the Frankensteinian vision that haunts the world today. Man has created great corporate automatons, empowered them with money, endowed them with strength and potency, and freed them from personal, social, or moral responsibility. Once imagined to be his neutral servants, who would keep him from the temptations of pride, avarice, envy, and gluttony, coerce him away from sloth, reduce and cabin his lust, and chasten his anger, these corporate men *manqué* have become his masters, driving him on, determined to achieve in their soulless domination a hitherto unimagined kind of tyranny. They have appropriated and neutralized sin, liberating men from their obligations to one another at the precise moment when these same men become slaves to their own immortal and untiring creations.

From the preceding section it is clear that, as Cherbonnier (1956:28) concludes: "…. the true realist is the man who acknowledges the distinction between good and evil and with it the category of sin".

Looking at humanity and human life across the boundaries of time and space and as we know it today in the here and now, one conclusion is inescapable. *Something went terribly wrong somewhere.* One needs not be a genius to come to this conclusion, as the empirical evidence is overwhelming. Not only do we observe the manifestation of the micro- en macrodynamics of destruction and degeneration in the physical-geographical, psycho-biological, socio-cultural and spiritual realms but sooner or later all of us personally experience the ravages of the destructive dynamic that relentlessly gnaws away at the very fibre of life and orderly substance in all its forms. Earthquakes, droughts, floods, environmental

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1   An important exception is Edward Alsworth Ross's *Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter Day Iniquity* (1973).

abuse, mental and physical illness in all its forms, marital and family disintegration, violence, rape and murder, poverty, corruption, domination of one individual or group by another individual or group be it ethnic, racial, gender, class or international domination, conflict or war and finally, the invisible but very real war that rages between Truth and Lie in the battlefield of the spiritual realm where ideas, words and philosophies of truth and deception vie for our attention and support, confirm and underline the fact *that everything is not well*. There seems to be a relentless and ultimate death-directness inherent in all of humankind's thoughts, words and actions as well as in the dynamics that operate within and drive nature and the greater cosmos.

All of this of course started when "... *the first human couple disobeyed God and fell victim to sin* ..." Ever since his condition has been typified as a state of decay and sin (*status corruptionis*) (Möller, 1997:2).

In this regard Lyman (1978:269) states "... man seems to be overwhelmed by evil and yet obscured from sin". The unpleasant realities associated with human existence carrying the stamp of death, pose questions like: "What has gone wrong in the world?" and "What is wrong with humanity – why all the hatred, fighting, killing, sorrow, pain, struggling to survive", "Why all the injustice?" "Why did my child/spouse/father/mother have to die such an agonizing death?" These questions demand answers.

Human explanations of these realities and answers to these questions remain unsatisfactory and incomplete. Lyman (1978:273), with reference to present-day society and sin, states:

> ... the scenes of sin are now much more different from those imagined by the early thinkers on the subject. Three moods or leitmotivs dominate the modern dramas of sin and evil – immensity, impersonality and ambiguity. The scale of evil committed in the world today seems to defy puny man's attempt to understand, much less to prevent it.

God's explanation of and word for this tragic state of human affairs, is of course "sin" and the consequences of sin. These and other empirical realities of human existence confirm the ontological reality of sin and its consequences.

The overwhelming and depressing force of the gravity of sin is such that, unless this burden is placed on the shoulders of Jesus Christ, who already carried this burden on our behalf and absolved us from its bondage, alternative escape routes have to be identified and used especially for the sake of mental and spiritual survival.

4.2 The denial of sin

Being confronted by the ontological reality and horror of sin and its death-directed, degenerative dynamic, without knowing and/or acknowledging Jesus

Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life out of this existential death-warrant, the denial of sin, as an attempt to escape the reality and consequences thereof, this becomes imperative. Lyman (1978:271-272) describes this tendency as follows:

> ... As the anxieties of life itself become too much to bear, individuals seek an escape from evil, a release from sin, virtually a departure from the human condition. In their heroic struggle to release themselves from the captivity of sinful life they exchange one *form* of life for another, each new *form* promising both liberation and security, the end of man's separation from himself, from God, from history. Harold Rosenberg is thus quite correct when he interprets Marx's theory of history as a great theatrical drama. It is a play that unfolds in five mammoth, era-long acts – Asiatic, Ancient, Feudal, Bourgeois, and Socialist Production. In terms of Simmel's theory of the dialectics of form and life, each epoch is an act in the drama of mankind's release from the formal conditions of human enslavement and its ultimate emergence into an existence that is life itself, freed from all forms. But the forms are man's own contribution to life – he gives it structure, meaning, rules, and customs. Encased in his own creations, architectonic man cannot escape. He can only hope for release.

In this process of denying sin yet having to face and struggle with its consequences, especially the social sciences tends to be seen and presented as a substitute, but false gospel to the world.

Guilt must somehow be sublimated. "The task of social theory is not to explain guilt away or absorb it unthinkingly in still another destructive ideology, but to neutralize it and give it expression in truly creating and life-enhancing ideologies". Becker believed that a new science of society – synthesizing ideas of Marx with those of Freud – might in its critical and tragic dimensions provide a moral equivalent of religion for the expiation of sin. "A science of society", he wrote, "will be a study similar to one envisaged by Old Testament prophets, Augustine, Kierkegaard, Max Scheler, William Hocking: it will be a critique of idolatry, of the costs of a too narrow focus for the dramatization of man's need for power and expiation" (Lyman, 1978:271-272).

Schuurman (1993:356) sees the denial of sin as the consequence of the denial of God as the creator of reality: "Men erkent de werkelijkheid niet langer als schepping van God, laat staan dat men de diepte van de zondeval en daarmee ook de totale en radikale verlossing deur Christus en de verwachting van de herschepping belijdt".

With its inclination to determinism and ethical neutrality then, the social sciences in general and sociology in particular tend to act as *substitute gospel in the mind of the unbeliever* by declaring, through its philosophies, theories and research, the innocence and guilt-free state of humanity and implicitly presenting science in general and social science in particular as the way to

redemption from the bondage of sin and its consequences. It is exactly this quality of the social sciences which affords it its almost irresistible attraction for the world.

4.3 Defining sin

What then does this phenomenon called "*sin*" entail?

Cherbonnier (1956:43-44) starts off by stating that the concept of sin is not exclusive to Christianity:

> *The word 'sin', then, a purely formal word referring to the disorientation of human freedom, is no monopoly of Christianity.* Every philosophy has its own conception of what man's external point of reference ought to be. Consequently, as the other side of the coin, it will also have its own conception of sin, though usually under a different name. The reason why it is mistakenly regarded as a 'Christian motif' is simply that the Bible, adhering more rigorously than most other philosophies to the implications of human freedom, keeps the problem of sin in the foreground, instead of trying to circumvent it. Until one realizes that the issues with which it deals are the issues of human life, one will scarcely be interested in its specific answer to a question one has never faced. Conversely, when a man does awake to the fact that the discovery of the true God is a matter of life and death, he can hardly afford to ignore words like these. [He then refers to Ezekiel (14:7, 8, 11).] The distinctively biblical conception of sin thus depends upon the biblical conception of God and the effect, which he exerts upon his worshipers.

"The words 'sin' and idolatry only become specifically Christian with the biblical answer to the question: '*Which is the true version of sin or idolatry*'? And this in turn depends on the prior question, 'Which (or who) is the true God?'" (Cherbonnier, 1956:42).

Cherbonnier (1956:61, 68) indicates that sin has been misconceived in two ways: Firstly as breaking rules and secondly as being intrinsic to human nature. The first misconception implies God to be involved in the "... quibbling calculation of quid pro quo" and implies that God's love is for sale (1956:62) and this is contrary to God's revealed nature.

The second misconception, which also implies the concept of "original sin" suggest an element of determinism in human's sinful behaviour which is contrary to the biblical conception that humans are free to choose. This conception, however, understands that sin is prior to individual acts of choice, and traces it to a defective human nature rather than to misplaced allegiance" (Cherbonnier, 1856:85).

Cherbonnier (1956:13) says that

If there is any viable alternative to it, the Christian doctrine of sin ought not to be taken seriously. Its consequences are far too momentous to warrant acceptance on any but the most unimpeachable grounds. The most obvious alternative is to deny that the conception of sin in any form, whether Christian or otherwise, is a meaningful or necessary category for the interpretation of human life. As against this view, the present book must demonstrate that some notion of sin, even though under a different label, is integral to the thinking of every human being. He who denies it ultimately succeeds only in concealing it from himself.

The other alternative to the Christian view would indeed retain the conception of sin but with a different definition. Historically all such definitions have fallen under one of two main headings: the moralistic view, which regards sin as the violation of given rules and standards; and the dismal conception of sin as some intrinsic defect in human nature. The book must therefore also refute these versions of sin before vindicating the specifically biblical view.

This is exactly what Cherbonnier does in his book, refuting the conception of sin as either merely a matter of breaking *rules* or merely intrinsic to human nature in the deterministic sense of the word. Cherbonnier (1956:13) then goes on to define sin with reference to the Bible in the following words:

According to the Bible, sin is properly defined as misplaced allegiance or, to use its technical word for it, idolatry. No man is without his 'god', in the sense of a focal point around which his life takes its orbit and which imparts a distinctive complexion to his values, purposes, and actions.

Möller (1997: 8-10) also discusses the meaning of sin as presented in the Bible and highlights the following characteristics:

- Sin as not reaching the goal – missing God's purpose for humanity.

- Sin as trespassing the limits imposed by God and rebellion by refusing to live in accordance with God's commandments.

- Sin as evil, especially the evil inclination that exists in man.

- Iniquity or lawlessness by living outside the law of God (Greek: *anomia* Matt. 7:23).

- Being guilty before God.

- Perfidy and disloyalty.

- Works of the flesh.

- Manifesting the spirit of the devil in the world.

- Crucifying the Son of God.

Berkouwer (1960:58) states that sin can only be defined in relation and with reference to God in the sense that sin in its deepest sense involves an unfathomable depth of wrong against God. Referring to the essential being of

sin, he lists the following: "val, ongehoorzaamheid, ontrouw, vijandskap, onge-
loof, overtreding, vervreemding".

Lyman (1978:271) defines sin as follows:

> Sin from this point of view is the human condition, the condition of alienation
> from God. In his separation from the divine he feels uncertain of his being and
> unknowing of his future. The material and fleshly world obsesses him, but he
> gains no peace of mind thereby. It is life itself that becomes a problem, and not
> merely particular acts in that life. Sin thus creates a drama of lifelong anxiety,
> as lonely, oppressed, and weighted-down individuals act or are acted upon in a
> theater of increasing absurdity.

Ellul (1985:60), with reference to sin, says the following:

> ... in truly Christian thought, sin is known and recognized for what it is only
> after the recognition, proclamation, and experience of forgiveness. Because I
> have been pardoned, I realize how much of a sinner I was. Sin is shown to be
> sin through grace and not otherwise, just as the abruptly freed slave realizes, as
> he sees his chains, how great his misery was.

Sin for the purposes of this article then will be conceived of as being two-
dimensional:

First of all it will be conceived of as being *intrinsic to human nature* i.e. as being
a natural inclination or predisposition to deny and therefore disobey God and to
hate one's neighbour. What is suggested here is simply that the first,
spontaneous, natural option which comes to mind in a situation of invitation to
sin, is to establish the *supremacy of self which rebels against God and God's
laws*. This would involve what the Bible calls our carnal nature (Rom. 8:6-8).
For instance, no father needs to call his son of five years old to himself, lift him
onto his lap and say: 'Son, today Daddy's going to teach you how to lie!' The
boy already knows how to lie without needing anybody to teach him. He has
been born with the inclination towards and the knowledge of how to lie and
needs to be taught the better alternative. Adults of course are more adept in
hiding or camouflaging this inclination or tendency. In essence, this involves an
inclination towards that which God would call evil or would disapprove of in
that particular situation.

In terms of what Cherbonnier suggested, the *tendency* towards sin is seen here as
the outflow or consequence of a defective human nature which in turn is seen
here as being a result of Adam and Eve's original sin. This, however, *in no way
implies that the resultant sinful behaviour which might or might not flow from
this inclination or tendency, is blindly determined as if humans had no choice or
decisional responsibility*, but merely that this is the response that, due to its
intrinsic nature, *tends* to be the primary and natural or *first option considered* in
a particular situation, e.g. to hate those who hate you or to love those who love

you to lie rather than speak the truth, etc. It needs to be stressed, however, that consideration and freedom of choice – in other words our decisional responsibility – always and inescapably stands between our natural tendency or inclination towards sin and the actual commitment of sin.

The second dimension of sin then would involve *a free choice, or the executing of one's decisional responsibility*, to act according to our carnal or sinful tendencies or inclination – i.e. out of free will and consciously, to do exactly that which God *would call evil or would disapprove of*

Sin then can be a defined as that state of being and those forms of behaviour which constitute a departure from that which God calls good or stated otherwise, conformity to that which God calls evil/wrong or bad. Sin furthermore is totally race-, gender-, and class-blind and refuses to be bound or limited by any sociological variable or category.

5. On the relationship between sin and deviance

The relationship between sin and social deviance will very briefly be described in terms of a typology in which sin has been defined as *that state of being and those forms of behaviour which departs from that which God calls good or conforms to that which God calls evil/wrong or bad.*

Deviance on the other hand has been defined as *that state of being and those forms of behaviour which depart from that which humans – or certain sections of humanity – call good or conforms to that which humans or certain sections of humanity call evil/wrong or bad.*

The relationship between sin and social deviance will now very briefly be outlined by drawing up a simple typology in which human definitions of good and evil will be combined with God's definitions of good and evil. The typology looks like this:

		God's definitions of	
		Good	**Evil**
	Good	**GG**	**GE**
Human definitions of	**Evil**	**EG**	**EE**

From the typology above it is clear that four types of behaviour can be discerned:

- GG: Behaviour that conforms to what both God and humans would call good and involves human obedience to God.

• GE: Behaviour that humans would call good but that God would call evil and involves obedience to humans but disobedience to God.

• EG. Behaviour that humans would call evil but God would call good and involves disobedience to humans but obedience to God. This constitutes an interesting category of behaviour as it includes what has previously been called *good deviant behaviour* but the possibility of which is denied by some sociologists. This is perhaqps the most challenging and difficult kind of behaviour required from Christians as it very often involves standing alone in a self-sacrificial way. This is exactly the kind of behaviour that Christ Jesus exemplified.

• EE. Behaviour that both humans and God would call evil and involves disobedience to both humans and God.

The relationship could further be clarified by means of *two overlapping circles*, the one circle representing sin, the other representing deviance. In terms of two overlapping circles it is clear that three categories of behaviour can be distinguished:

• Behaviour considered sin from God's perspective but not considered deviant from human perspective.

• Behaviour considered deviant from human perspective but not considered to be sin from God's perspective. Looking at Scripture, this seems to be the kind of behaviour God encourages in His children by calling on them to depart from that which is wrong and evil – thus to be Godly deviants!

• Finally a category of behavioural overlap between sin and deviance which could therefore be considered to be both sinful and deviant.

6. Conclusion

By accepting God as the *Ultimate Definitional Authority* not only in our lives but also in the study of social deviance, we are – in terms of the *logovision premise* – enabled to gain the following advantages:

• First of all we will be enabled to see reality as it really is, i.e. to distinguish the true good from the false good and true evil from false evil and thus avoid the pitfall of acting in a fatally inappropriate manner in a world full of deceptive definitions of what constitutes good and what constitutes evil. This would also bring an interesting and exciting dimension into the study of deviance as evaluative issues would not need to be avoided but could be confronted in a bold and constructive way in both teaching and research.

- We would be able to clearly distinguish good deviant behaviour from bad or evil deviant behaviour. In terms of the typology, the latter would include behaviour that both God and humans would call evil and behaviour that humans would call good but God would call evil.

- Though the phenomenon of definitions of good and evil being relative to a particular time and place would remain, the problem of *evaluative relativism* and the evaluative confusion accompanying this relativism, would disappear as God is taken as *Ultimate Definitional Authority* concerning inter alia definitional issues of good and evil/ good and bad/ right and wrong and God in and through Jesus Christ would thus become The Absolute One relative to whom else is measured.

- We would realize that deviance (of the variety which humans would call evil but God would call good) can indeed be a very good form of deviance that should be encouraged.

- Ethical neutrality – chosen because of the fear to boldly confront issues of right and wrong – could be replaced by *agape* love (love in spite of) in the approach towards and study of deviants. Thus love could become the guiding principle in the study of and in dealing with all issues of good and evil and eventually could become the "... concentration of all normativity" (Schuurman, 1993:353).

- The study of deviance could be performed with evaluative and intellectual integrity in the sense of calling good "good" and evil "evil" instead of vice versa and doing that without apology.

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