

# The Root of Our Troubles

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Like you, I'm horrified by the exponential growth in social chaos and totalitarian impulses ravaging our country. It seems as though nothing makes sense, there isn't a unifying cause tying together the upheaval of American culture. Of course, that's the nature of chaos, right?

Is it Neo-Liberalism, Cultural Marxism, Feminism, Capitalism, Socialism, Fascism? None of those "isms" quite fit the bill.

To better understand what's happening, it may be worth digging deep into the canon of Western Civilization, specifically *Genesis* and then Plato's *Republic*.

In *Genesis*, we find the old story of Adam and Eve, those first humans created by God according to the traditions of Judaism and Christianity.

*(Let us for now set aside any debate over Creationism and Evolution. We're not here for that right now, we're here to gain wisdom and understanding from the literature of the past.)*



As anyone familiar with the story of Adam and Eve knows, they were created perfectly and without sin by God, who situated them in the Garden of Eden. They walked with God, wanted for nothing, and overall seemed to have quite the perfect existence.

There was only one rule they had to obey:

*And the Lord God commanded the man [Adam], saying, "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 in the day that you eat of it you shall die."*

For a while it appears that Adam and Eve obeyed the rule, but then the serpent came along.

*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

Well, we know how the story ends. Eve takes a bite of the forbidden fruit and then gets Adam to do the same. Nothing is the same after that moment. Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden, punished to toil and work the rest of their lives, and to end in death. It is a curse passed on to all subsequent generations.

At the heart of Original Sin is the temptation to "be like God." One wonders if we aren't dealing with the same impulse today, though writ large.

Culturally, our elites have rejected the ideas of natural law, God's laws, man's laws, and even the laws of biology and reality. Many of our leaders burn with the desire to have no authority over them, to "be like God."

Overall, as a society we have been influenced by our elite to embrace the same lust for power, like God, to self-actualize.

Do you want to live a certain way? If it's your truth, that's just fine. No one or thing should stand in your way. Do you reject your biology and claim to be a non-binary, wolf-kind? That's just fine, too. And when the reality of your biology gets in the way, science will be there to make the necessary physical changes to make possible your chosen self-actualization.

Consider even the appeal of Socialism today. In it we find the idea that you are not free unless the government makes possible your desires. It actually makes sense. Many Americans have come to elevate the self above all else. It is their "god." When something exterior to the self comes in conflict with self-actualization, we do not reflect and wonder about the rightness or wrongness of our desires. Instead, we turn to the collective to remove that barrier.

While the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato doesn't quote from *Genesis*, he is actually even more pointed about the source of our social chaos. In Book VIII of *The Republic*, Plato describes Democratic Man as "all liberty and equality."



That's quite a loaded statement that deserves to be unwrapped. Arguably, it is the metaphysics behind our embrace of relativism. If all people are free and equal to come up with their own truth, then there can be no truth. On the other hand, if we admit that there are truths that transcend our being, then we are confronted with the idea that we may have to subject ourselves to those transcendent truths, that there may be an external standard by which we are to measure ourselves.

As Plato writes,

*Neither does he receive or let pass into [his mind] any true word of advice; if any one says to him that some pleasures*

*are the satisfactions of good and noble desires, and others of evil desires, and that he ought to use and honour some and chastise and master the others –whenever this is repeated to him he shakes his head and says that they are all alike, and that one is as good as another.*

...

*Yes, I said, he lives from day to day indulging the appetite of the hour; and sometimes he is lapped in drink and strains of the flute; then he becomes a water-drinker, and tries to get thin; then he takes a turn at gymnastics; sometimes idling and neglecting everything, then once more living the life of a philosopher; often he is busy with politics, and starts to his feet and says and does whatever comes into his head; and, if he is emulous of any one who is a warrior, off he is in that direction, or of men of business, once more in that. His life has neither law nor order; and this distracted existence he terms joy and bliss and freedom; and so he goes on.*

*Yes, he replied, he is all liberty and equality.*

Here we come to understand the social chaos we are seeing. Too many of our fellow Americans no longer have the tools or desire to arrange their lives in accordance with a hierarchy of values. If we were to do so, we would admit that there is a natural law and transcendent truths. Instead, we are slaves to our passions. All values are equal and so we do whatever comes to us in the moment and send damnation on anything that gets in the way.

I believe that desire is the root of the rage you see so often unleashed. It is the desire to be like God, but confronted by the reality of human limits. Those things that go against our personal truth, such as tradition, law, customs, and so on, are to be destroyed so that there can be no doubt as to the

rightness of our personal truth.

According to Plato, the pursuit of our desires leads to more and more social chaos, which ultimately ends in tyranny.

*When a democracy which is thirsting for freedom has evil cupbearers presiding over the feast, and has drunk too deeply of the strong wine of freedom, then, unless her rulers are very amenable and give a plentiful draught, she calls them to account and punishes them, and says that they are cursed oligarchs.*


...

*Yes, I said; and loyal citizens are insultingly termed by her slaves who hug their chains and men of naught; she would have subjects who are like rulers, and rulers who are like subjects: these are men after her own heart, whom she praises and honors both in private and public. Now, in such a State, can liberty have any limit?*

...

*By degrees the anarchy finds a way into private houses and ends by getting among the animals and infecting them.*

...

*I mean that the father grows accustomed to descend to the level of his sons and to fear them, and the son is on a level with his father, he having no respect or reverence for either of his parents; and this is his freedom, and [non-citizen] is equal with the citizen and the citizen with the [non-citizen], and the stranger is quite as good as either. *

...

*And these are not the only evils, I said –there are several*

*lesser ones: In such a state of society the master fears and flatters his scholars, and the scholars despise their masters and tutors; young and old are all alike; and the young man is on a level with the old, and is ready to compete with him in word or deed; and old men condescend to the young and are full of pleasantry and gaiety; they are loath to be thought morose and authoritative, and therefore they adopt the manners of the young.*

...

*The last extreme of popular liberty is when the slave bought with money, whether male or female, is just as free as his or her purchaser; nor must I forget to tell of the liberty and equality of the two sexes in relation to each other.*

*And above all, I said, and as the result of all, see how sensitive the citizens become; they chafe impatiently at the least touch of authority and at length, as you know, they cease to care even for the laws, written or unwritten; they will have no one over them.*

How true of our times are Plato's words? Whether we want to call it Original Sin or the spirit of Democratic Man, we have watched everything Plato described happen. Is not his last sentence an apt description of political and cultural discourse in our times?



*And above all ... see how sensitive the citizens become; they chafe impatiently at the least touch of authority and at length, as you know, they cease to care even for the laws, written or unwritten; they will have no one over them.*

They will have no one over them, they will be like God.

If you agree that that sentence describes our times, then I would argue it is the impulse of Original Sin, the desire to be like God, that infects our times and ties together the social chaos. All of the “isms” are merely ways to rationalize and make possible one’s self-actualization, one’s desire to become like God.

And if that is truly at the root of our current travails, our times do not end well unless there is a great awakening.

No ideology, law, or tradition can adequately beat back the toxin in our collective system. At the end of the day, we must admit that we are in a spiritual battle. Either man will be like God or we will humble ourselves and live in accordance with reality.