

them. That is, those who were more educated in finance were even more inclined toward questionable behavior. Although most of us *perceive* avarice in a negative light, we can be greedy ourselves when given the right justifications for our behavior.

Cultivating Cooperation

Despite this capacity to rationalize selfishness, people do not always avail themselves of it. They can often be quite selfless, sacrificing their own welfare to benefit others. People help those in need, donate money to charities and volunteer their time. (Yes, even economists sometimes help the elderly lady carry her groceries across the street.) In scenarios such as the dictator game, most participants reliably share some of their wealth—despite the fact that the rational economic decision is to keep it all.

All in all, humans are part Scrooge and part Robin Hood. We are more likely to be selfish when we can easily explain our choices or when we fail to consider the people who could suffer from them. Yet when we think about the people whom we can hurt and help, we behave more considerately. The lessons are straightforward: we must not let rational economic theory eclipse the fact that greed can be damaging. Next, we should work to make the consequences of our actions clearer, with the hope that our cooperative spirit will be boosted by concrete examples of those who might bear the brunt of our actions. And finally, we must combat the rationalizations of self-interest, including the simplistic mantra that greedy behavior propels society forward.

Yet if you are still trying to surpass the Joneses, bear in mind that above the poverty line, having more money will not make you appreciably happier. In fact, research shows that individuals who focus on financial success are less stable and less happy overall. So rather than splurging on a high-end grill that will make your neighbor jealous—and perhaps add to your debt—choose instead to help your neighbor assemble her grill for a block party cookout. And if the party small talk turns to the economy, slip in a pitch for cooperation rather than greed. **M**

(Further Reading)

- ◆ **Altruistic Punishment in Humans.** Ernst Fehr and Simon Gächter in *Nature*, Vol. 415, pages 137–140; January 10, 2002.
- ◆ **The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good.** Robert H. Frank. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- ◆ **Economics Education and Greed.** L. Wang, D. Malhotra and J. K. Murnighan in *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pages 643–660; December 2011.
- ◆ **Happy Money: The Science of Smarter Spending.** Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton. Simon and Schuster, 2013.

History ^{of} Sin

TRACKING THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS—FROM THEIR EGYPTIAN ROOTS AND INFLUENCE ON THE ARTS TO THEIR DEBUT IN BLOCKBUSTER FILMS AND IPHONE APPS

BY LUCIANA
GRAVOTTA

A.D. 375 Monks living in the desert in Egypt identify eight thoughts that weaken their devotion. *Talking Back*, a book by Roman monk Evagrius of Pontus, instructs monks on how to fight gluttony, lust, love of money, sadness, anger, listlessness, vainglory and pride.

Early fifth century John Cassian, a student of Evagrius, proposes that the sins connect sequentially. For example, he suggests that lust comes from gluttony and avarice arises from lust.

Late fifth century Priest-historian Genadius of Massilia translates Evagrius' work into Latin. He posits that the devil and human nature alike lead us into temptation.

590 Pope Gregory the Great revises the list to create the one we know today: pride, wrath, envy, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust. He considered pride to be the root of all sins.

1215 Texts detailing the seven deadly sins abound after a church council decrees that all Christians must go to confession at least once a year.

1265–1274 Thomas Aquinas writes *Summa Theologica*, in which he defines lust more precisely as adultery, rape, seduction, bestiality, sodomy, or sex without reproduction in mind.

Early 14th century The rise of a wealthy middle class leads some theologians to decry avarice as the number-one sin.

Circa 1308–1321 Dante Alighieri writes the *Divine Comedy*, which delves into the punishments doled out in purgatory for every sin. For example, the proud were humbled by having to carry heavy stones.

1500 Hieronymus Bosch paints *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*. In a series of everyday scenes, Bosch depicts the aristocracy as proud and lustful, merchants as envious, avaricious and slothful, and the poor as wrathful and gluttonous.

1556–1558 Pieter Brueghel the Elder's engravings use cartoonish characters and surreal landscapes to depict the sins.

1812 The Brothers Grimm publish their famous book of fairy tales, establishing envy as a common trait of stepmothers.

1892 Charles Allan Gilbert draws his famous visual pun *All Is Vanity*, an image of a woman admiring herself in the mirror that, when viewed from afar, looks like a skull.

1933 First performance of George Balanchine's ballet *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Every act takes place in a different city: wrath in Los Angeles, lust in Boston and envy in San Francisco, to name a few.

1950s A win for sloth: TV remote controls enter mass production. One early model was Zenith Radio Corporation's "Lazy Bones."

1964 Gluttonous Augustus Gloop, greedy Veruca Salt and wrathful Mike Teavee take a fateful tour of Willy Wonka's factory in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

1987 The movie *Wall Street* picks apart the greed behind corporate raiding and insider trading.

1989 One of the first empirical studies on how Christians rank the sins is published. This sample of parishioners views "life-rejecting melancholy" as the worst sin, followed by lust and anger.

Mind.ScientificAmerican.com

590



1308–1321



1500



1556–1558



1995



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1993 Australian artist Susan Dorothea White proposes that today's deadly sins are the opposite of the original ones. Indifference has replaced anger, workaholicism has ousted sloth and squandering is more prevalent than avarice.

1995 The movie *Seven* is released. In the film, a serial killer targets "sinners," with every "punishment" designed to fit the "crime."

1995 Homer Simpson proclaims sloth to be part of American culture: "If you don't like your job, you don't strike. You just go in every day and do it really half-assed. That's the American way."

1997 The International Federation of Competitive Eating is born, establishing gluttony as a sport.

1998 Cognitive-behavior therapy, which emphasizes reframing thoughts and behavior change, is shown to be effective for anger management.

2002 *Pride* takes a venomous turn: the FDA approves Botox to improve the appearance of forehead lines.

2008 Bishop Gianfranco Girotti announces that the Catholic Church has added seven new sins: polluting, genetic engineering, obscene wealth, drug abuse, abortion, pedophilia and the perpetration of social injustice.

2009 Roberto Busa, an Italian priest and Jesuit scholar, tallies up confessions he has received. He concludes that men's number-one sin is lust, whereas pride tops the list for women.

2011 First confessional iPhone app is developed. It helps users keep their sins straight and includes a "custom examination of conscience" and the ability to "choose from seven different acts of contrition."

2012 *Pride* and *envy* get a facelift. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reports that the number of cosmetic procedures is up 250 percent since 1997.

(The Author)

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