

# Applied psychology (Part 4): Like a virgin?

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**I**mmediately as new-borns, we inherit a complex system world, including traditions, customs and techniques acquired by our parents and ancestors through hard work, with an alternation of disappointments and triumphs. Although naked, we are born in a systemized accommodation (society including technology). As a result, our very first act immediately appears on the balance sheet of that system. The production and logistics of the first consumer items such as rompers and disposable nappies contribute to the ecological footprint. The so-called UK's Overshoot Day falls on May 19 this year. If all of humanity consumes like the people in the UK, the demand for natural resources by May 19 would exceed what the earth can regenerate this year. The Dutch Overshoot Day even fell on February 19. Earth Overshoot Day falls next month. Not an ideal reality, in which we were born, which is why we spoke of "original sin" last week.

Unlike guilt, original sin is only a poor stimulator of behaviour change. It's easy to understand that it seems rather unfair to blame a new-born for the major problems that humanity faces after several centuries of technological progress. That also applies to all those natural peoples, who lived in harmony with their environment, where the concept of Earth Overshoot Day did not apply at all. After they were colonized, they ceased to exist as natural peoples (reduced cultural diversity). They too have started to contribute to the depletion of the planet and the consequences for nature (especially the other species): reduced biodiversity due to mass extinction and tampering with genetic manipulation).

Yet original sin is a form of guilt. Debt, as we stated last week, represents a discrepancy between the actual situation and the ideal situation. If the balance is skewed, we must try to restore it, to keep the situation liveable or fair. A loan, for example, is an example of taking on debt to make the desired situation (for example owning a house) possible, without first saving. By doing penance (paying off the mortgage a little each month), we reduce our debt until there is no debt left. The discrepancy between the actual situation (not being able to afford a house) and the ideal situation (owning a house) has disappeared.

## Repaying debt

Everyone understands that debts must be repaid. This is different with original sin, because it concerns the responsibility of everyone in general and therefore no one in particular. We are all responsible for our planet, but the feeling that we have to act on it individually is beyond our minds as well as our senses. We do have a vague realization that we are not on the right track and that it can even affect us: war, animal suffering and lack of perspective for our young people. Yet we have all learned to shake it off and move on and hope for innovation, robotics and smart technology. We pass on the consequences of this to the next generations. We only inherited this far from ideal system world, and it's just impossible to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.

In art, traditional religious ideas about original sin have been denounced, for example that the woman as a seductive creature incites the sensible man to sinful thoughts. In *Like a Virgin* Madonna chooses the Catholic Church as the setting. Now in her 60s, she ironically argues that aging is a sin. Things that make the discrepancy between what counts as ideal (only sex within marriage, always staying young and flexible) and what actually happens (indulge in adultery, grow old and fall short) should not be attributed to one group with, for example, women as temptresses and guilty, and men as victims of weak flesh. Yet this psychological foundation – guilt and original sin – is necessary to understand, in order for our behaviour worldwide to pay off the discrepancy between happy offspring (ideal) and an unsustainable exhaustion of the planet (reality). How do we handle that? Anyone have a good idea?