**The History of “Failure” in the Era of “Success”**

1. Western culture “accepts success only as a criterion for judgement. However, it cannot say what success is […] because the success is determined as ratification for a law unknown to us” (Lyotard 35, 2006).
2. At the basis of this pioneering study is the assumption that the race after success and the attitude toward failure derived from it, did not originate in capitalism. Capitalism only reinforced, nurtured and positioned this pursuit at the center of existence. One finds many harbingers in Western civilization that contributed to economy-motivated developments. As is well known, Weber traced the origins of the Western modern capitalist phenomenon to religious Protestant and Calvinist roots (Weber 1984, 42) and examined how religious success becomes material success, a point we will elaborate on later. However, he argues that the pursuit of material success is not a purely capitalist matter. According to Weber, greed and pursuit of profit, are not inherently capitalistic. “This drive is imbued since the beginning of time […] on the contrary, capitalism may in fact obstruct, if not rationally moderate this irrational impulse. Hence, capitalism denotes the pursuit of profit – by means of a capitalist, rationalist permanent apparatus” (3).

This article’s main argument is that the worldview linking

religious success to earthly and material success (like the linkage between religious and earthly failure) does not first appear in Luther or Calvin.

Rather, its conceptual basis appears in the Bible which associates religious success – that is, desired behavior in the eyes of God – with worldly, economic success. Weber’s account of Franklin’s utilitarianism, as well, is not free of Old Testament religious rhetoric. Attempting to explain Franklin’s industrious and utilitarian character, Weber deliberately selects a quote from Franklin’s autobiography – a verse from the Bible that Franklin’s strict and meticulous Calvinist father repeatedly recited to his son in his youth: “Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings” (Proverbs 22.29).

1. The preliminary genealogical study will be applied to a corpus of canonized religious texts in Western culture, focusing on the Bible, and to some extent, on the New Testament. Various scholars have provided answers to what uniquely characterizes Western culture, answers that, although differing, reflect a unanimous conformity regarding the core of Western culture. Carl Deutsch presents eight principal characteristics of Western civilization, including Catholicism and Protestantism (Deutsch 1981, 51-93). Religion is the archetypal mark of cultural identification. Thought systems and cultural values are reflected in the religious doctrines of any given culture. Christian religion and culture in the West were founded on the sacred texts of the Jews distributed throughout various regions of the Roman empire (Malkhin 2003, 44). The Hebrew Bible was perceived as a sacred text in both Judaism and Christianity – as an absolute truth, a product of divine revelation (Hacohen 2006, 23). While the Catholic church paired scriptural authority with traditional authority, Luther negated the latter and declared Sola Scriptura. That is, every individual should read the Bible because it is the most comprehensible of all. The reformation positioned the Old Testament at the heart of European identity (Eliav-Fedlon 1997, 30). Therefore, the Bible serves as a primary source for our genealogical study. The proposed genealogy focuses on the creation story, the story of the Garden of Eden and the conception of Jewish-Christian judgment, while highlighting motifs of success and failure in religious texts. We attempt to interpret these motifs in terms of how the author perceived them in the historical context of their creation. The motifs’ frequent and continuous repetition over time, as well as the fact that over the generations these texts became culturally formative texts, is the foundation for our assumption that the motifs constitute origins for key values in contemporary culture.
2. Christianity adopted the image of the judging god and great father. Based on the conception that gods are projections of human personalities and desires, one can argue that knowledge of the God worshipped in the West, glimpses the image of Western man in a generalized typology. Man is incapable of constructing anything other than human conceptions of God (Feuerbach 1957, 13). The idolized religious object is no other than the idolizer’s disposition; therefore, God is man’s reflected image (30). Jung objected to Christianity’s characterization of God’s as supreme good. In his opinion, man strives to achieve religious success and fears failing in the eyes of the great judge. To exemplify, Jung points to Catholicism which, despite the disappearance of some of its sectors between the middle ages and modern era, has never lost its vitality. Our modern-oriented consciousness is infused with Christianity (Jung 1987, 65-66).

“To believe that God is the Summum Bonum is impossible for a reflecting consciousness. Such a consciousness does not feel in any way delivered from the fear of God” (Jung 1954, 93).

1. Notably, “success” in biblical terms means religious success – in other words, to satisfy God. In the biblical text, one identifies the dichotomy between success and failure that, although later subject to processes of secularization, will remain embedded in the culture.
2. One can see here the first buds of the conception of ‘the failing individual’, although Judaism perceives failure as a collective issue, while failure becomes individual in the Christian worldview.
3. In the eyes of its critics, the Christian church’s failure was detrimental. While demanding religious success from its believers – manifested, among other things, in material modesty – the church itself accumulated great wealth.
4. The Calvinist conception of failure is unbearable. When we examine the conception of failure in America, as Sandage describes it, we must take into account that the American colonies were founded by Puritan Calvinists. In a culture in which success is a supreme value, failure is unbearable (Sandage 2005, 26). In his essay, Weber demonstrates how Protestant, especially Calvinist, religious rhetoric becomes the secular rhetoric that propels capitalism. As an economic system that encourages people to accumulate, work arduously, proselytize, save and put work at the center of existence, capitalism is motivated by religious constructs deeply embedded in the culture. Weber’s main argument is that the religious concept of the primordial sentence , as well as Calvin’s doctrine of election , transition from a religious system to a secular, economic system based on structural roots of religious consciousness (Weber 1984, 76-90).
5. Material success is God’s gift to his chosen people.
6. Jesus views property as a substantial obstacle on the path to salvation. “Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18.25). To be redeemed, man must rid himself of his possessions. This world is not important also because it will soon come to its end (Kleinberg 1995, 21).
7. The fundamental difference is in the matter of choice. In Judaism, those who live their lives according to the commandments achieve material success. Man has the right to choose whether to lead a life according to God’s commandments, or not; in Calvinism, those who enjoy material success must be elected by God, and those who fail to succeed are not among the elected. There is nothing man can do to change his position.
8. Epilogue

This article presents a preliminary examination of the origins of the race after success and avoidance of failure in Western culture as grounded in the Old Testament. The creation and Garden of Eden narrative discourse contains many motifs pertaining to success and failure, as described by the biblical narrator, from values latent in the Bible. The concept of failure constitutes a narrative frame for the Eden story. In the story’s Christian interpretation, the primordial sin entails calamitous consequences because all of first man’s progeny bear the primordial sin-ultimate failure within.

Likewise, a preliminary genealogy of the concept of Jewish-Christian judgment was conducted while distinguishing between Catholic Christianity and Protestant Calvinist Christianity. Western culture, as we have seen, recognizes a legislating, judging and punishing God. In Judaism, judgement is principally external and collective. Christian Catholicism exacerbates judgement, including for intention, and nurtures the “failing individual” idea and the sense of guilt that accompanies failure. According to Freud, the foundation for the cultural feeling of guilt is in Christianity and is associated with fear of the judging authority (Freud 1988, 129). Similarly, Fromm maintains that the individual’s sense of guilt and failure are rooted in the Catholic culture as a consequence of the concept of sin in Christianity (Fromm 1992, 39). In Protestantism and Calvinism choice is absent, and failure is predetermined even before birth; thus, this is where the struggle to identify both success and signs of election comes into play. Generalized arguments pertaining to religions are problematic, therefore, we scrutinized the common religious foundations in Western culture – in all that is related to the pursuit of success and the attitude toward failure – foundations that constitute an “umbrella” under which beliefs and values of all varieties operate. Our objective is to understand how our culture is dominated by fundamental beliefs and ideas so deeply rooted that they are often only apparent in hindsight, in another age. The genealogy undermines perception of these cultural cornerstones as intuitive concepts.