INTERVENING, SUPERSEDING CAUSE
Anon.

The most subtil Serpent had led Eve to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and was now cajoling her to have a bite. “Why should God not want you to learn the difference between good and evil? It is a virtue devoutly to be desired. How could He possibly be angry at your attempts at self-improvement?”

So she did eat, or at least she started to.

Shortly before Eve’s arrival at the Tree, a Bird of Paradise had flown over the spot and had had in an in-flight bowel movement, and the excrement had fallen on the very apple Eve now chose to sample.

As soon as she bit into the apple she expelled the bite violently with an execration. She flung the remainder of the apple into the forest, and the Serpent slunk away in dismay.

That same day, in the cool of the evening, God was taking a stroll in the Garden when by chance He encountered Eve.

“My dear Eve, mother of mankind,” He began in his most unctuous voice, “do you know if anyone has been eating of the Tree of Forbidden Fruit?”

“Not me, my Lord,” she responded sheepishly.

“I think otherwise,” He pontificated.

“One of the apples is missing from the Tree, and Uriel says he distictly recalls having glimpsed you at the tree in the presence of the subtil Serpent at about noontime today.”

Realizing that truth is always the best policy, particularly when you are cornered, Eve reluctantly responded:

“Well, my Lord, yes, I did take a little bite, but I spat it out because it tasted like bird shit.”

“I beg your pardon?” the Lord interrupted huffily.

“Bird shit,” she repeated. “Then I flung the apple away into the forest. Come, I’ll show you if you like.”

“That will not be necessary,” He replied haughtily. “And you didn’t swallow any of the apple?”

“No, my Lord, I didn’t.”

“Intending to sin is just as bad as sinning,” the Lord announced sententiously.

“May I remind my Lord,” said Eve, “that you simply told us ‘Thou shalt not eat,’ You never said anything about not thinking about eating.”

“My God!” exclaimed God to Himself. He was taken aback, and filled with premonitions.

Note

1. Performative Revisited. Suppose the events as described in Intervening, Superseding Cause had occurred in Genesis 3. Would Eve be guilty of mortal sin? Is your answer that of a moralist, or of a lawyer?