The article by Professor Richard La Croix called "The Paradox of Eden" is clearly a work of brilliance. The analysis is only three paragraphs long, every word obviously chosen with care. The writing is deceptively simple at first glance, yet it requires, like Buber, many readings to appreciate it fully. It seems to present a clear and logically irrefutable case that follows every option to its conclusion and finds that justice is neither an essential nor a necessary property of God. It leaves ineluctably clear but unstated the further conclusion that since the various God concepts in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions do necessarily link God and justice, and since at the time these traditions teach the Eden story, then "their God is no God," that is, the teaching itself self-contradictory.

The argument proceeds inexorably, after the manner of mathematics, so that it is possible to diagram it:

I. Before eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve either knew or did not know that disobeying God was evil.

II. If they knew, then
   (a) They had nothing to gain, so
   (b) There was no temptation.
   (c) God, who is omniscient, knew
       (a) and (b).
   (d) Therefore this test was not a fair test.
   (e) Consequently, the punishment is unfair.
   (f) God's action is unjust.

III. If they did not know, then
     (a) They were not responsible.
     (b) Therefore God's action in holding them responsible is unjust.

IV. Either they knew or they did not know. Then,
    (a) Either way, God's action is unjust.
    (b) But sometimes God's actions are just.
    (c) Therefore justice is not a necessary or essential property of God.
La Croix's argument seems to be unanswerable, and several generations of students in upper division philosophy of religion courses have been unable to find a flaw in it. It represents the most serious kind of threat to traditional Jewish, Christian, and Islamic understandings of and teachings about both God and the meaning of the Eden story. If the Eden story demonstrates, regardless of how it is taken, that God acted unjustly, then either the doctrines about the Fall of Man must be given up or the teaching that God is necessarily just must be sacrificed. Or, as a third possibility, one must live uncomfortably with the knowledge that the Eden story demonstrates God's injustice regardless of whether Adam and Eve knew that disobeying God was evil or not. In three fairly short paragraphs, La Croix's thesis poses a set of grave and serious problems.

It is not clear that there are any flaws in the argument at all, but there are some parts of it that are weaker than others. The first of these is La Croix's contention that "God punished them for their disobedience." The Hebrew Bible is very careful about the concepts of punishment and disobedience. The Biblical writers carefully discriminate various categories of misdeed, and the three that might most appropriately be expected here are $h$t, $w$n, and $p$b.$ The first of these, occurring 238 times in the Hebrew scriptures, technically means to transgress as a result of going wrong, actually to miss one's mark. It is frequent in both the J and E source documents for Genesis. The second is a poetic term, also common in Genesis, but linked with trouble, sorrow, and wickedness. The last, also found in Genesis, has to do with deliberate rebellion and transgression.

None of these words are found in the Hebrew text of the Adam and Eve story La Croix cites. An extensive and flexible vocabulary of sin and punishment and disobedience was available to the JE writers and redactors and it was not used, any of it. It is not clear, therefore, that we can assume that there is a transgression here, or a punishment. There are acts which have consequences, but that is theologically a different matter. Perhaps the case of Adam and Eve was set up to teach a lesson rather than to relate a history of a person. That is not far fetched considering that "Adam" is merely the Hebrew word for "Man", and is frequently used in this very narrative with the definite article, which indicates in proper Hebrew style that it was not to be read as a proper name in those cases. If that is so, then issues of fairness are irrelevant to the point of the story. In sum, the Bible does not say Adam and Eve were disobedient, and the Bible does not say that God punished them. In the Cain story the Hebrew text speaks of punishment, but here there are only actions and consequences.$^3$

Further, La Croix contends in his first sorites that if Adam and Eve knew that disobeying God was evil, they had nothing to gain from eating of the tree since they already possessed the knowledge of good and evil. There are, however, other possibilities. They might have understood that they were to obey God, or better, that they were not to disobey God, but they might still not have had a full knowledge of good and evil. In that case, there would have been something to be gained through disobedience. Also, the Biblical expression $w$b $w$r, which we translate as "good and evil", may not mean what we think of in connection with