
THE KNOWLEDGE AND EMOTIONS OF ADAM IN PARADISE IMAGINING THE ORIGINAL JUSTICE WITH AQUINAS

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Abstract

The description of Paradise in Aquinas's theology is based on the concept of rectitude ('rectitudo'), which points to the state of man living in what is called 'original justice' in a realistic - and not merely symbolic - way. Due to its temporality and non-definitive nature, Paradise represents a time that assumed the necessity of final salvation. Therefore, Adam's faith in Paradise was necessary as a means of reaching Heaven. His sin changed the way or circumstances by which the human being reaches it, but not the goal itself. In this context, Aquinas looks at the relationship between the natural and moral order and Adam's perfection before the Fall, which is relative (perfection at a given stage of development) rather than absolute. The paper will present Aquinas's description of Adam's way of knowing God in Paradise (which was not the beatific vision) as well as the nature of his faith before the Fall and its relationship to emotions and virtues. It will also refer to Aquinas's thoughts on why the 'old creation' was needed at all and, thus, why the 'new' one was not established immediately. Finally, a question will be asked about the aspects of the Thomistic description of Paradise that may still be attractive to contemporary theologians in reference to modern science.

Keywords: original justice, evolutionary biology, Creation, natural order

1. Introduction

Many of our contemporaries consider the medieval debates on Paradise and life before original sin - in the state described as original justice - to be trivial, especially when they hear questions such as 'Did Adam grow in virtue in Paradise?', 'How did he know the world and God?', 'Did some have power over others?', 'Did people reproduce?' or 'Did Adam suffer from toothaches or other pain in Paradise?'.

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At the same time, the truth about the world as it existed in the beginning and about the evolution of humankind that is being discovered by natural sciences appears to place the ‘Darwinian Adam’ in stark opposition to the ‘biblical Adam’. This view was summarized by D. Houck, who identified three major divergences: ‘continuous origins’ (whereby a single human action would modify the germline), ‘complex origins’ (whereby the bad desires were inherent in the hominid ancestors, so there was no original justice) and ‘communal origins’ (whereby the modern human lineage is derived from a population of individuals rather than from two solitary ancestors) [1]. In the face of these challenges, some scholars such as J. Schneider make radical proposals to depart from the perception of Adam’s life as fully virtuous and immune to suffering prior to the change brought by sin, arguing instead for a theology which claims that Adam was immature and spiritually and morally frail [2]. This view stems from the presupposition that if there had been no perfection in Adam at the beginning of time, then there would have been no ‘Fall’, either. The author attempts to convince readers that his view draws from Saint Irenaeus’s portrayal of Adam as being on his way to perfection, the difference being that Irenaeus accepted the idea of falling into sin [3]. The above premise has also been adopted by other authors, such as B. Sollereider [4], who presupposes the imperfection of man at the beginning of creation but justifies it with an eschatological orientation towards fullness.

In this paper, I would like to focus on Aquinas’s ‘Adam’ by reflecting on his life in Paradise before sin, including his emotions, his knowledge of the world, his dominion over other creatures and his relationships with other human beings. This opens the question concerning the nature of perfection in the *state of innocence* - a perfection which is not absolute but relative and which makes it possible to think about the Fall, although in different terms than those suggested by the Augustinian narrative. These issues are often overlooked in discussions on original justice, which makes it difficult for us to even ‘imagine’ that original state [5].

2. Deconstructing the Neoplatonic vision of Paradise

Before we proceed with our analysis and reconstruction of Aquinas’s vision, it needs to be noted that the contemporary collective image of ‘Paradise’ is clearly marked by Neoplatonism (and Augustinianism), with its claim of a transtemporal Fall. “Inspired by Neoplatonism, the early Christian theologians Origen and Gregory of Nyssa adopted a view according to which human beings were originally created as disembodied immaterial entities. These immaterial entities only came to be embodied after engaging in some sort of sinful activity or another.” [6] Therefore, in order to understand Aquinas, it is necessary to deconstruct that image. In other words, we need to use Thomas’s method to demonstrate what Paradise is not (*videtur quod non*) in order to make an attempt at answering the question of what it actually is.

It appears that man's paradisiacal life did not proceed in a state of beatific vision, as evidenced by the very debate around the 'paradisiacal motivation' (i.e. the reason why Adam could have succumbed to temptation while being perfect and living in an optimal world) as summarized in Murray's *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*. The author attempts to demonstrate the incoherence of the Augustinian image according to which "the initial human pair fell from a paradisiacal state in which they were free and rational, enjoying the beatific vision and possessing everything a rational creature could want" [6, p. 83-84]. For Aquinas, however, the paradisiacal state did not consist in possessing the beatific vision, and any further arguments on how it was possible for man to allow himself to be deceived in that state simply confuse the state of original justice with the *visio beatifica*. Importantly, these are two different states!

It is also worth noting that Aquinas is primarily (although not exclusively) interested in what happens to the human nature, his interest in the universe as such being secondary. Therefore, he speaks not so much about a 'fallen world' as he does about man who lost his rectitude and, in a way, went out of tune. Following this analogy, man after sin continues to resemble the same instrument, but has to be tuned once again to play the right notes. Therefore, Aquinas does not speak of the world in terms of a theatrical stage set that someone has suddenly changed in the wake of sin, thus placing man in another context, because it is in man that the change has occurred.

Furthermore, the disvalue and harm that appear in the evolutionary image seem to undermine the vision that the world was created as good, or at least raise the question of how this goodness should be understood [7]. Aquinas responds that the very order of goods permits the existence of evil so that "man should advance to the end of good both through the good and through the evil of another man" (*Summa contra Gentiles* III 140) [8]. According to Saint Thomas, therefore, the 'goodness' of the world does not mean an absolute absence of pain or imperfection but an environment in which the human self can develop in freedom. Thomas gives a clear indication that the fact that Adam did not suffer does not mean that the history of evolution does not include death or suffering: "For the nature of animals was not changed by man's sin, as if those whose nature now it is to devour the flesh of others, would then have lived on herbs, as the lion and falcon. . . . Thus there would have been a natural antipathy between some animals." (*Summa Theologiae*, I 96.1 ad 2) [9]

If we assume, therefore, that there had been a long history of the emergence of natural order before Adam, as described by the Theory of evolution, then there arises a theological question as to why natural history before Adam has been necessary at all. The answer that comes from the biblical narrative is the conviction that the history of the world begins with God's presence - a presence which does not control creation by force but instead strengthens it and gives it meaning so that it can express God's love, which can only be fulfilled eschatologically. This is about the ways in which God's love emerges, engaging natural forces (both altruistic and selfish) and leading them towards the destination [10].

3. Paradisiacal life-style - original justice

A conviction held by Aquinas that is important to his understanding of paradisiacal life is that Adam had been created in grace, or more specifically, the ordering grace of original justice, which empowered him to achieve full participation in the life of God - without sin or suffering [11, 12]. This was possible not due to the fact that he had something that Adam after the sin did not (because it had been taken from him as things are taken from a child who is misbehaving), but due to the fact that he had become disordered - like scattered notes that no longer form a melody and are reduced to a collection of disjointed sounds. Therefore, the consequences of sin are not a 'punishment' inflicted on nature; instead, as a result of that event, nature was 'left to itself' which means that none of the moral powers were in themselves corrupted [13], though they may have been wounded.

Thus, while we typically hold a culturally 'static' and 'transtemporal' view of Paradise, Saint Thomas sees it as a space for and way of development. In the state of original justice, Adam was perfect 'as regards age [and] stature', which means that Aquinas does not consider the paradisiacal situation as something absolute but rather as something appropriate for a given stage of development (*De Veritate* 18.4 s.c. 2) [14]. This is why he is interested in a number of issues which demonstrate that Adam broadened his knowledge through his way of knowing the world, for example due to the fact that what he knew by intellect would then become real in an experimental manner. All this was possible because Paradise was not a destination but an intermediate location on the way to eternal happiness: "Man was happy in paradise, but not with that perfect happiness to which he was destined, which consists in the vision of the Divine Essence. He was, however, endowed with *a life of happiness in a certain measure, as Augustine says*, so far as he was gifted with natural integrity and perfection." (*Summa Theologiae* I 94.1 ad 1) [9, p. 442]

This state was characterized by the existence of an internal order that could only be threatened from without, which is one of the reasons why Adam had angels as his guardians. Nevertheless, Adam was also capable of avoiding perils from without thanks to his own foresight and to God's grace.

3.1. The three dimensions of rectitude

If the state of affairs in Paradise can be described as 'original justice', this is because of what constitutes the essence of justice: the correct frame of reference and the relations and order that exist in the will, making it possible for us to give what is due - as expressed by Saint Anselm. According to Aquinas, Adam's main characteristic is precisely that order, which he refers to as 'rectitude' (*rectitudo*). This view is based on the biblical passage which says that "God made man upright" (Ecclesiastes 7.30, *Deus fecit hominem rectum*), which means that He set man right - the term has a dual meaning of 'righteous' and 'of good disposition'.

Rectitude consists in being duly subordinated to the ultimate goal and manifests itself in three types of ordering, of which the first one - ordering towards God - is key, for if it were to waver, as when a sweater is torn, others would follow and all else would lose its harmony. For that reason, according to Aquinas, Adam's sin did not concern the sphere of the senses but that of spirituality, causing the first man to stop functioning in his typical manner while remaining in the same world. The paradisiacal Adam's strength in his natural life was, therefore, his relation to God. Thus, "in a way, as a result of the Fall, Aquinas's Adam returned to a purely natural, spiritually and morally impoverished state and so would have experienced an 'original fragility'" [12]. The three main manifestations of rectitude are the following:

- subordination of the higher powers (e.g. reason or will) to God;
- subordination of the lower powers of the soul (e.g. emotions) to reason;
- subordination of the body to the soul (whereby the body does not hinder knowledge and volition).

This ordering of man has implications for his knowledge of the world and his behaviour, so it is clear that there is a principle at play that governs other matters. Aquinas finds that Adam as the *principium* of humankind was capable of knowing things that concerned not only the first principles but also the purpose for which the processes that he observed were taking place. According to scholastic epistemology, the goal is to know things not only in terms of general principles, as it were virtually as Thomas would say ('confused knowledge'), but also in terms of how they become actualized. This stems from the assumption that the workings of nature begin with what is perfect, and therefore Adam - being set as the principle for future generations - was to be distinct in having sufficient principle for such *instructio*, which is why his mind did not resemble a *tabula rasa* and why he had the fullness of knowledge of all things.

In more specific terms, Thomas emphasizes that Adam did not have knowledge of things in their natures, since all things did not exist in their natures at the time, but rather in the Word; he knew them by way of definitions, understanding their proper nature (e.g. knowing the quality of being horse-like rather than specific horses as such). In that manner, all things were in his intelligence, even though he did not perceive them all with his senses. This means that he was able to progress in his knowledge of creation. More specifically, Thomas believes that Adam could make progress in knowledge in two ways: 1) by knowing through Divine revelation the things that could not be reached by natural reason or by knowing through the senses the future things that would reveal what he had not known before; or 2) by gaining confirmation through sense experience of the things that he had only known through intellectual knowledge. In fact, it was particularly satisfying for Adam to find that the nature which he was experiencing acted in accordance with what he had previously known in his mind. Nevertheless, he did not possess perfect supernatural knowledge, since his body - while naturally perfect - was not endowed with the perfection of glory [15]. Therefore, Aquinas claims that while

it was fitting for Adam to have all the virtues by reason of original justice, it was not necessary for him to possess all the knowledge. His way of knowing was thus not to 'find out' new things but to re-experience what he had known habitually [16].

On account of the limits of natural knowledge, which - according to Saint Thomas - comprise the knowledge of: 1) future contingent things (*futura contingentia*), 2) thoughts of hearts and 3) dispositions of creatures as subordinated to Divine providence, natural knowledge does not make it possible to discover the complete order of providence that subordinates certain things to supernatural ends. Living in the state of original justice, the human beings possessed knowledge through grace, which was how God spoke to them 'within'. This knowledge, however, was not always knowledge in the act, instead being given only to the extent revealed by God. This exaltation did not concern the 'manner of knowing'. However, since this would have entailed a change of 'state'; instead, it pertained to the intelligible object, which is why this knowledge through grace, too, is based on phantasms, as is the case after sin with knowledge of faith or prophetic revelation.

Therefore, Thomas claims that in his state of innocence, Adam possessed knowledge of the existence of angels that was superior to what we have after sin, but he did not know them by their essence. Aquinas accounts for this by referring to the nature of human knowledge, which relies on *species*; his reasoning in that respect is clear as it derives from the conviction that Adam did not have a miraculous knowledge that was different from what we have today. He could not know angels, separate substances, if - as Thomas emphasizes - he used knowledge based on active and passive intellect. In his quest for knowledge, he had to deliberate in order not to fall into error, although he was able to avoid any error by reason of his rectitude.

However, Adam knew his own soul perfectly by reason of his excellent knowledge of intelligible things. Recounting the dispute about whether Adam could be wrong in his knowledge or whether he could form false opinions on the things that surrounded him (whereby Jerome believed that Adam could err and Augustine believed that he could not), Thomas maintains that there could be no such false knowledge due to the ordering of the intellect and will: just as there was no bodily defect, there could be no false opinion in Adam's understanding of things, either, since he not so much had 'opinions' about things as he knew everything with certainty. For that reason, Adam immediately recognized that the serpent could not speak and therefore did not enter into a dialogue with it. His sin did not consist in being deceived on an intellectual level but in his exaltation, the arrogance of his mind, which led to the severance of the affective union that bound his soul to God.

Thomas believes that "Adam should have had in its perfection everything which human nature requires" (*De Veritate* 18.4 ad 2) [14, p. 257] to be perfect. Hence, from an objective point of view, imperfections may have existed in Paradise since the perfection of Paradise was relative. According to Aquinas, Adam lacked nothing in himself at that stage, though he did in comparison to

other life, other beings. And as regards his journey towards perfection, it was to be through “a long process of response to grace and submission to God’s will that Adam, equipped as he was with free choice, was intended to advance towards ever closer resemblance to his Maker” [17]. Therefore, according to Saint Thomas, Adam’s sin consisted rather in a complacency in his goodness, a willingness not to relate to the Creator - standing with his back towards the light and contemplating his own shadow instead of knowing the things created in God’s light [18].

3.2. The emotions, virtues and powers in Paradise

When discussing the perfection that comes from the right order of the will, Thomas raises questions concerning the presence of emotions and virtues as well as the manner of dominion over other human beings and animals.

With regard to the emotions of the first people, Thomas notes that they were exceptional in character and that their very presence was important due to the fact that it stemmed from the nature of the human being as one who has sensual desires and who suffers (*patior*). In that respect, he argues, perfection does not consist in the absence of emotions but instead in their orientation (e.g. kingly rather than despotic rule). What emotions, according to Aquinas, did Adam have in Paradise? Above all, those concerning the presence of good, such as love, joy or hope for future good, although not in the same manner as we experience them. In Adam’s case, on account of rectitude, the world of the senses and emotions was subordinated to reason, and therefore emotions followed from knowledge rather than preceded it - which stands in contrast to the situation after sin where emotions push one towards knowledge or distort it. Thus, emotions did not get in the way of reason. In Adam’s life, there were no emotions associated with evil and no desires or concerns as to whether some good would emerge, because he - being rightly ordered - did not fear whether he would attain such good in the future. And as regards the sensation of pain, it is important to read correctly the statement that Adam felt no pain, which would suggest impassibility to any of the evil or suffering that - as we know - existed around him. This appears to suggest a distinction between two senses of suffering: a change from natural disposition and a change that leads to the perfection of Nature, the latter being what prevailed in Adam’s life.

In Aquinas’s view, due to the coherence of his intellectual, moral and physical condition, Adam was capable of responding to the challenges of the external world by taking guidance from providence, in relation to which he remained well ordered. According to Thomas’s teaching on providence (and on any form of grace), providence does not substitute for man in his action (in a sense wrapping around him so that he does not feel anything from the external world); instead, it strengthens created beings and guides them towards the attainment of their goals through freely-made decisions [19]. This means that no matter how difficult and perilous the external environment was for Adam, it would not have caused pain and suffering to him. Thus, he would have been able

to avoid many perils by his own resourcefulness or with the help of providence. In that respect, it may be helpful to distinguish between being susceptible to pain and suffering pain. Adam did not suffer the kind of pain that would be associated with the loss of some good, for example illness, internal disorder or disturbance, but he might have been affected by some minor health conditions, because this would have permitted him to navigate the surrounding natural world more easily and in a more useful manner [12].

Natural difficulties would not have been overcome by way of some supernatural removal of obstacles directly by God but, as Thomas maintains, by the integrity of nature strengthened by God's gift. Thus, as he believes, Adam would have overcome fever - had it affected him - by the efficacy of his nature and would have conquered difficulties with the help of God's grace. All this would have been possible thanks to the "Divine favour, whereby the integrity of human nature was maintained in [him]" (*Summa Theologiae* II-II 164.2c.) [20], since Nature was so designed that there were no excesses, and if they had been necessary, for example on account of expulsion of excess food, they would have existed 'without any foulness'.

Furthermore, being exposed to such circumstances would not have interfered with the virtuous pursuit of a goal; on the contrary, it would have led to the development of virtues which can only emerge in the face of adversity (e.g. valour - the transition from possibility to action). Life in the dangerous and difficult world would have endowed Adam with virtues "such as solidarity, cooperativeness, tolerance, compassion, and altruism, up to personal sacrifice for the common good" [21].

Adam's possession of virtues follows from the essence of rectitude, which entails proper subordination of sensual powers to reason and of the soul to God. This is why Aquinas states that Adam would have possessed all of the virtues, although some virtues pertaining to certain imperfections - such as penance or pity - would have only existed in habit, not in act. It may also be surprising to find that the first man "was so disposed that he would repent, if there had been a sin to repent for; and had he seen unhappiness in his neighbour, he would have done his best to remedy it" (*Summa Theologiae* I 95.3c.) [22]. So, the issue with the sin that broke original justice is not the mere fact that it occurred (as if any sin could cause the loss of the state of innocence) but the absence of a plea for God's help or, in other words, man's persistence in this new state rather than the fact that some individual 'error' was made.

At the same time, Saint Thomas notes that certain virtues existed in man, though under the aspect of good, and that these virtues directed him towards the correct goal. In that sense, Adam was endowed with moderation and valour, but only with regard to good. Adam's moderation consisted in maintaining the right proportion of pleasure, and his valour consisted in possessing the right measure of courage; they did not pertain to sorrow or fear - as has been the case with virtues after sin. The same applies to perseverance, which existed but only concerned persevering in good rather than withstanding any external circumstances.

3.3. Dominion over Creation

The Bible speaks of the relationship between man and the surrounding world in terms of “keeping” (Genesis 2.15) and “dominion” (Genesis 1.28). Similarly, Thomas discusses Adam’s knowledge in terms of it being needed to govern his own life and the lives of others, although the understanding of “dominion” is different.

This follows from the fact that people in Paradise would not have been clones and that there would have been differences between them on as many as three levels, that is: 1) differences in sex so as to enable reproduction; 2) differences in virtues and spiritual life, for since they possessed free will (and were capable of deserving Heaven), then there would also have been inequalities in righteousness and knowledge as some would have been more or less inclined to gain knowledge than others; and 3) bodily disparities associated with different climates and the impact of external circumstances (which once again highlights Thomas’s realism): “some would have been born more robust in body than others, and also greater, and more beautiful, and all ways better disposed; so that, however, in those who were thus surpassed, there would have been no defect or fault either in soul or body” (*Summa Theologiae* I 96.3c.) [22, p. 460]. Therefore, it would have been possible for inequalities to exist without being seen as injustice.

Relations between people would have been based on governance among free individuals that would have consisted in orienting them towards their own good or the good of the community. Thus, dominion of one over another would have existed in the state of innocence, which Thomas justifies by arguing that man is a social being and that in multiplicity, a superior is needed to safeguard the common good [23, 24]. And as regards some rising above others in virtue, this would have been used for the good of other people - out of concern for one another and in mutual service. In summary, a model similar to council-based governance would have prevailed in Paradise. Concerning animals, man’s mastership would have consisted in commanding them (in a similar manner as in the case of sensitive powers) as well as using them: “thus also in the state of innocence man’s mastership over plants and inanimate things consisted not in commanding or in changing them, but in making use of them without hindrance” (*Summa Theologiae* I 96.2c) [22, p. 459]. Furthermore, predatory animals would not have injured man by reason of his proper use of things, which means that he would have known how to prevent them from doing him harm.

This invites a reflection on the situation of animals in the realities of Paradise. Thomas directly addresses the opinions of those who claim that animals were tame in the state of innocence and that it was only after sin that they began to live in the wild and kill other animals. He argues that the nature of animals did not change in such a way that those previously feeding on grass would suddenly begin to feed on the flesh of others; on the contrary, they had been so from the beginning, with only some of them feeding on trees and grass and the rest remaining predators. Therefore, any relationship to man should be

interpreted in terms of Providence, of which man would have been the executor towards animals. According to Thomas, this would have meant a certain ‘taming’ in the same sense as when trained falcons are given fowl as food.

Thomas also wonders whether man would have eaten animals in Paradise and concludes that before the Flood, humans would have consumed plants and fruits of the earth in accordance with God’s command concerning green plants (Genesis 1.29). In his view, eating fruits of the earth would have reflected the simplicity of life and modesty of diet which God intended to promote among men by forbidding the consumption of many species of animals. In this manner, man would have relied upon Providence to provide him with food without the effort involved in hunting or farming. Only after the Flood does a mention of animals being used as food appear (Genesis 9.3).

The conclusion that the change of Nature is not a mere change of ‘scenery’ for Aquinas is supported by how he interprets the mention in the Book of Genesis of the thorns and thistles that bring hardship to man after sin. Did they appear all of a sudden? Thomas replies that “if man had not sinned, the earth would have brought forth thorns and thistles to be the food of animals, but not to punish man, because their growth would bring no labor or punishment for the tiller of the soil” (*Summa Theologiae* II-II 164.2 ad 1) [20, p. 574-575].

4. Conclusions

Aquinas’s description of the lives of the first people can still fit into the framework of the world represented by evolutionary sciences as regards the material beginnings of humankind [25, 26]. There is no need to choose one or the other; on the contrary, as is often the case with Aquinas, the two approaches can be reconciled. In his vision, the *sacra doctrina* is not intended to compete with natural sciences by producing its own knowledge and instead looks at the findings of other sciences *sub ratione Dei*. In that sense, Theology places these sciences within a theological framework and looks for the meaning of scientific theorems. It is not surprising, then, that Thomas also retains this kind of sensitivity to the questions posed by science in his description of Paradise and himself puts forward important questions concerning the functioning of man in that environment [27].

Which ideas concerning human life and Nature before original sin seem relevant to the contemporary dialogue between Science and religion? In response to this question, it is worth highlighting some of Thomas’s concepts that bring structure to his reflections and bode well for such dialogue.

Firstly, it is helpful that **Thomas’s description of Paradise and life in the state of innocence remains realistic**: predators are predators, and man’s life is based on rectitude, synchronization and harmony. Man is set within time; he has emotions and develops virtues on his way to Heaven. Thomas correctly formats biblical history, making it compatible and capable of being correlated with natural sciences. Man’s well-being is not a matter of miracle but the effect of his proper internal ordering.

Secondly, there is a **dynamic concept of Nature**. The sin committed by the first people breaks the ‘covenant’ with Nature, which - as *ars divina* - is a manifestation of the Creator’s wisdom. Nature has its own dynamisms thanks to which it is itself capable of achieving the goals inscribed in it. Since *Deus et natura nihil frustra faciunt*, a broader look at the meaning of natural history before sin is possible.

Thirdly, the **correct understanding of grace** plays an important role, making it possible to understand how - in the world described by the Theory of evolution as being marked by the presence of aggression [28, 29] - Adam could have withstood the influence of that aggression thanks to the sanctifying grace of rectitude [30].

Fourthly, there is a **focus on the Fall of man** rather than that of Nature. After sin, Nature becomes rife with challenges ‘for’ man, yet it still is the same nature, although changed from its earlier state [31].

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