

Q&A: Did Adam and Eve have Natural Needs?

By Dorothea Ludwig-Wang, 15 March 2023

Q. God made Adam and Eve perfect in the original state of innocence, and we know that if they had not sinned, death would not have entered the world. Death implies bodily decay, so does this mean that prior to the fall, they had no need for food and drink, which prevent bodily decay? If there is no bacon or steak in heaven, and nothing could die before the fall, this would seem to indicate that Adam and Eve had no natural needs like this. In fact, possessing these needs would have placed them in a servile state with respect to other creatures, despite God having given them dominion, and it would mean that they were not in fact perfect. So did Adam and Eve have natural needs?

A. While death did enter the world through sin,¹ there are a few additional distinctions that must be made. The death that came about through sin refers specifically to *human* death, which came through the revocation of a special divine favor granted to mankind that exempted them from death. It belongs to the nature of material things, as God created them, to deteriorate over time; given that the human body is material, in its natural state, it theoretically could have been subject to decay even before sin, eventually leading to death. Through a free gift, God decreed that Adam and Eve, along with their offspring, would not die as long as they did not sin, and after original sin, this privilege was withdrawn as punishment. In this way, St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between death being “natural on account of a condition attaching to matter, and penal on account of the loss of the Divine favor preserving man from death.”²

Because the animals were never given the special favor that Adam and Eve received, they could theoretically have died before the fall, regardless of whether they actually did so. Aquinas explains that there would have been a “natural antipathy between some animals” even before the fall,³ which suggests that they could have killed and eaten each other. As for Adam and Eve, they had no need to eat meat prior to the fall, as they had no need to use the animals to fulfill their bodily needs: they did not need clothes and had sufficient food from the trees of paradise.⁴ Instead, the animals were created to reveal human dignity, highlighting the contrast between irrational and rational animals. Prior to creating Eve, God commanded Adam to name all of the animals, which made him cognizant of his lonely state and lack of a human companion.⁵

That Adam and Eve did not need to eat meat does not necessarily imply that they had no need to eat food at all. If they did not need food, then why would God have created the trees of paradise and allowed them to eat the fruit thereof, aside from the one tree forbidden to them?⁶ To imply that God condoned the sin of gluttony by allowing them to eat when they did not require food would be nonsensical. The fact that there will not be food in heaven is not relevant here, as

1 Rms. 5:12.

2 *ST II-II*, q. 164, art. 1, ad. 1.

3 *ST I*, q. 96, art. 1, ad. 4.

4 *ST I*, q. 96, art. 1, ad. 3.

5 Gen. 2:18-20.

6 Gen. 2:16-17.

Adam and Eve did not have the Beatific Vision in the Garden of Eden. God also commanded them to “increase and multiply,”⁷ which requires marriage and the marriage act, but marriage will not exist in heaven.⁸ There will be no inclination for food and drink, or to marry and reproduce, in heaven because the saints will have glorified bodies in a *supernatural* state, infinitely surpassing the *natural* state that Adam and Eve were in.

Thus, the existence of these natural needs, though much less demanding prior to the fall and requiring less to satisfy them, is not a sign of imperfection, as long as the necessary distinctions are made. Aquinas defines perfection in a three-fold way: “first, according to the constitution of its own being; secondly, in respect of any accidents being added as necessary for its perfect operation; thirdly...in the attaining to something else as the end.”⁹ On the first point, creation was perfect after the six days because it was actual; it had passed from its potential state—the idea which pre-existed in the mind of God from all eternity—to its actual state when God brought being out of non-being. On the third point, creation is perfect because all things are directed to God Himself, who alone is essentially perfect.

However, the perfection of creation after the six days and the perfection of creation at the end of time are not the same, as will become clear by examining the second point. God created a universe confined by the limits of time; because time is a measurement of change, and change requires potency, this means that the existence of potency is proper to the nature of a finite, time-limited universe. The existence of time was willed by God: He could have created an eternal universe, but He chose not to, instead opting to create a world in which things change, according to the laws governing the transition from potency to act. The existence of potency here, then, is not truly an imperfection, but a *necessary accident* for the universe to properly function according to its finite nature, and so creation is perfect in the second sense.

The fact that God, Who is pure act, is the final end of all things, means that there will come a day when time will cease to exist, and along with it, potency. Thus, a distinction must be made between the *first* perfection of creation as it existed after the six days, and its *final* perfection, when all things have been directed to their ultimate end. After the General Resurrection, human bodies will be in a glorified state, which is why human beings will no longer have any need for bodily nourishment, and there will be no more decay. However, this glorified state results from the work of grace and is not proper to human beings in their natural state alone, as that glorified state is supernatural. The state of a human being in heaven is infinitely higher than the state Adam and Eve were in prior to the fall in the Garden of Eden, because as excellent as the Garden was, it nevertheless still existed within the confines of time.

In the Garden, there would have been potency, while in heaven, there is no potency, as being united to God means being united to pure act. Because potency is simply proper to the nature of a finite universe, Adam and Eve were perfect according to “the first perfection” which “is the completeness of the universe at its first founding.”¹⁰ This perfection, as demonstrated earlier, would not have excluded natural desires for food, drink, and the reproductive act, although these desires would have been less intense and easier to moderate and subject to reason. Adam

7 Gen. 1:28.

8 Matt. 22:30.

9 *ST I*, q. 6, art. 3. co.

10 *ST I*, q. 73, art. 1, co.

and Eve were not perfect, however, according to the “final perfection,” because they were not yet in “the perfect beatitude of the saints” which will only come at the “consummation of the world.”¹¹ Thus, the glorified bodies of the saints at the end of time, which will no longer need food or drink, are not truly comparable to the original bodies of Adam and Eve prior to the fall, which were only perfect in the first—and not the final—sense.

Far from being in a servile state with respect to other created things, Adam’s and Eve’s partaking of food and drink would actually be an example of them exercising dominion over the rest of creation, for these temporal goods were created for them and their use and benefit, not the other way around. A human being would only enter into a servile state if he *inordinately* partook of the goods of the earth, thus committing the sin of gluttony. If one becomes a slave to one’s appetite, then one fails to exercise dominion; if one partakes of the goods of the earth in a properly-ordered manner, then one is not a slave, but rather a master who directs things to their proper end. Simply possessing bodily needs does not make one a slave; indulging in inordinate desire does. And it is that *concupiscence*, which only began after the fall, which created the risk of becoming a slave to one’s appetite, rather than the natural desires for food and drink themselves.

To summarize: Adam and Eve were preserved from death by divine favor, not by human nature itself in its original state, and this favor was revoked after the fall. This favor never applied to other animals, who could have died before the fall, including by killing and eating each other. Although Adam and Eve did not need the animals for food, clothing, or any other practical purpose—as the animals were created to reveal the dignity of the rational human nature—they still needed nourishment, as demonstrated by their consumption of the fruits of the trees of paradise. This does not imply imperfection, as Adam and Eve were perfect according to the first perfection of creation, which possesses potency as God intended it to. However, there was no concupiscence prior to sin, and the natural needs for food and drink would have been more easily subjected to reason, finally ceasing to exist in heaven when bodies will be in a glorified state.

11 *Ibid.*