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# Thomas Aquinas on the Effects of Original Sin: A philosophical analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

Original sin is a theological doctrine grounded in Revelation regarding our need for salvation and the fittingness of Jesus' birth and death for the forgiveness of sin.<sup>1</sup> The effects of original sin, however, encompass a broad range of phenomena intrinsic to features of our experience of being human, particularly our experiences of a propensity for moral failure, our inability to live and act as we think we ought to, and the presence of what appears to be real moral evil in human actions and lives that can't otherwise be explained by ordinary kinds of good willed ignorance, weakness of the will, or bad habits. A predisposition towards moral and intellectual failure appears to be written into our very nature and therein inclines humans to act in immoral or evil ways. This paper proposes to explore the effects of original sin and in doing so ask whether the phenomena generally associated with the effects of original sin have implications for philosophy. The goal of exploring the effects of original sin will be restricted to just three tasks: a) a broad interpretation of the general phenomena associated with the effects of original sin, b) a brief interpretation of Thomas Aquinas' account of the essential features and effects of original sin, and c) a broad discussion of the implications of this analysis for doing philosophy. It is the primary goal of this paper to demonstrate that the phenomena generally associated with the effects of original sin do indeed have implications for how philosophy is done and the arguments it produces.

## AN ORDINARY EXPERIENTIAL CHARACTERISATION OF THE EFFECTS OF ORIGINAL SIN

When we consider the ordinary experiences that we might call the effects of original sin, the phenomena appear to hinge on experiences something along the lines of the following: we humans

all desire to be good and to know the truth, we also to some extent already know what we believe to be truly good, or we already know what we think we ought to do but in each case we fail: we fail in achieving what is true and good, we fail to act in a way consistent with our beliefs, and we fail to act how we think we ought. The heart of the matter appears in the first instance to be the reality of failure, and moreover, a kind of failure that can't be easily explained or rationalised away in philosophical terms.

The truth is that, absurd as the classical Pauline doctrine of original sin may seem to be at first blush, its prestige as a part of the Christian truth is preserved, and perennially reestablished, against the attacks of rationalists and simple moralists by its ability to throw light upon complex factors in human behavior which constantly escape the moralists.<sup>2</sup>

These ordinary experiences of failure are summed up by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, chp.7, vs.14-23:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.<sup>3</sup>

It is precisely these kinds of experiences of an inclination to do wrong against our will that appear in the first instance to, as the quote above suggests, immunise the theological notion of original sin from the attacks of rationalists and moralists. As such, it is worth exploring these initial kinds of experience in a little more depth.

An experience associated with original sin in human life is connected to what gets called concupiscence. We find in the lament of Lancelot in his failure to find and grasp the Holy Grail an insight into this kind of experience:

Ah! God, my sin and the wickedness of my life now stand revealed. Now I see that above all else my weakness has been my undoing. For when I should have mended my ways, then did the enemy destroy me, blinding me so effectually that I could not discern the things of God. Nor should I marvel that I am purblind, for there has not passed an hour since I was first a knight but the murk of mortal sin has lapped me close, for more than any other I have given myself to lust and to the depravity of this world.<sup>4</sup>

The essential feature of what gets called concupiscence appears to be a predisposition to aim at short term, immediate, and particular appetitive goods at the expense of longer term and more sustaining goods. It is a matter of inordinate desire for immediate and generally physical or emotional gratification at the expense of more substantial or transcendent goods that then gives rise to either a failure to achieve what is believed good, or alternatively, falling into doing the wrong thing whilst in pursuit of merely immediate goods. Concupiscence is most commonly associated with phenomena like lust but arises really in any experience in which appetites or desires conflict with our reasoned beliefs about what is good for us or what a good life entails. In this way, what gets called concupiscence signifies an internal conflict between our appetites\desires and reason in which reason, or at least the will to act in accord with reason, seems more often than not the loser.

A central experience associated with original sin in this respect is that of knowing that we shouldn't do something but doing it anyway. Most of these kinds of experiences appear to be shaped by appetites or desires which overwhelm our better judgment. We know, for example, that we shouldn't have any more chocolate but we somehow nonetheless convince ourselves that we may as well finish it off now; we know that we really should go to bed in order to be ready for a busy day tomorrow, but somehow end up deciding to watch just one (or two or three) more episodes of a television show. There are two key features worth noting of these kinds of experience: first, that in each case our appetites and\or desires overwhelm our intentions to do good and live well, and second, that in each case it is not merely about being overwhelmed by appetites and desires but also a matter of our will

surrendering to those appetites or desires and reason then providing post hoc rationalisations justifying the action we think bad. In the case of the chocolate as soon as we surrender to our appetite for it we also begin to rationalise our decision: 'there are only four more pieces', 'it would be a shame not to finish it off now', 'it will only get eaten by the children in the morning if I don't eat it', 'it would be better that the children don't eat the chocolate', and so on and so forth. In this case someone could quite easily have in their mind that they shouldn't be eating the chocolate (that it is a bad thing to do) and yet at the same time be trying to convince themselves, in the midst of finishing the chocolate off, that their decision to do so is reasonable and good and pleasurable. These examples are, of course, seemingly innocuous but I think indicative of the kind of thinking that would go on even with more serious and morally significant experiences of this kind.

Another experience associated with original sin is that of wanting to be good and wanting to do what is good and yet finding ourselves lacking the necessary motivation to actually do it or make it real. Take for example a young boy who would like to be an excellent football player like his hero Lionel Messi. He has been told many times by his parents and his coach that to be like Messi he needs to be fit, to work hard, and to practice football skills for hours every day. The idea, however, of waking up early every morning to run for fitness is just too unpleasant a thought and there is always an excuse not to do it. The idea of practicing football skills every day is a wonderful idea but unless his friends or parents will play with him he just doesn't feel like it. It is lonely and boring practicing football by oneself. At any rate, most of his friends play FIFA on the computer or Xbox instead. At least in that context he can pretend to be as good as Messi and chat to his friends online. Thus, the desire to excel at football is reduced, over time, to a thinking that he is the best at football because he plays a computer game.

This experience and the way of thinking implicit in it is particularly pernicious in human life for it tends to express a kind of moral and intellectual laziness that in turn tends to lead to a kind of obstinate immorality wherein human persons make a decision to think of themselves good without having done

anything to merit the judgment and this in two important ways: first, insofar as we reduce the good to a kind of empty expression of self-worth without any real substance to it, and secondly, inasmuch as we come to see ourselves as good and therefore provide post hoc justification for all of our own actions. Because we believe ourselves good (because we really do want to be good) we spend quite a bit of effort justifying the goodness of our actions, even in the cases where we really know that our actions weren't good at all. We all, if we think about it, can remember how hard it was to learn how to drive a car or ride a bike, and yet, we can't bring ourselves to admit that everything in life worth doing will be equally if not more difficult than this. We want to be good but we do not want it to be hard work to be good.

There is a kind of intellectual laziness that mirrors moral laziness. In our tendency towards moral laziness we leap ahead of ourselves and believe ourselves good without any requirement for formation or action. In our tendency towards intellectual laziness we convert our desire for the truth into an unthinking conviction that what we believe is true without further thought or justification. This intellectual laziness is particularly dangerous in that it allows human beings to detach ourselves to a lesser or greater degree from the reality of our own life and reality in general. The effect of intellectual laziness is often the kind of worldview that we find Heraclitus railing against in what remains of his work *On Nature*: 'But although the *logos* is universal, the majority live as if they had an understanding peculiar to themselves'<sup>5</sup> and elsewhere 'to those who are awake, there is one ordered universe common to all, whereas in sleep each man turns away to one of his own...'<sup>6</sup>

Another experience associated with original sin is our inclination to disobey reasonable rules of behaviour or to refuse to acknowledge the authority of law to bind us. Edgar Allan Poe in his *Black Cat* gives an insightful description of this experience, remarking:

Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart— one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of man. Who has not,

a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow.<sup>7</sup>

The crucial point of Edgar Allan Poe's remarks, as I read them, is not that there is a perverse inclination in the human heart towards evil, but rather, that we take laws, even those laws that are ordered towards our good and the good of others, to be an imposition on us that we are perversely inclined to disobey merely because it is an imposition from an external source. The perverse inclination at stake here is a kind of implicit rejection of authority. A rejection of the thought that our will ought submit to any authority external to itself. Arguably, it is also possible to read in Poe the suggestion that this perverse inclination extends to a kind of internal revolt against the idea that we should be subject even to the authority of our own reason.

The effects of original sin are also experienced in our relations with society and history. This kind of experience is often marked by either overly positive utopianism or bleak pessimism in the face of economic, scientific, and technological progress. Sometimes, and for some people, there is a paradoxical awareness that the more we see ourselves as capable of progress and making the world better the more damage we appear to do to each other.<sup>8</sup> Equally, there is also a sense in which the more power we gather to ourselves through technological invention the more aware we are of our capacity for destruction.<sup>9</sup> The experience of the effects of original sin in relation to the social and historical is also, finally, found in a kind of dangerous progressive utopianism inasmuch as the more we see ourselves, historically and socially as good, the more blind we become to our own failures and the more we offer rationalisations for why the world doesn't live up to our utopian ideals.<sup>10</sup> As Stephen Duffy notes:

In the 20th century, however, in which human beings have already killed well over one hundred million of their kind, disenchantment set in. Two world wars, the Gulags, the

Holocaust, Korea, Vietnam, the nuclear and ecological threats formed a somber litany that makes the optimism of the liberals ring hollow and naive. Despite technological progress, evil, far from vanishing, has only become more powerful and more fiendish.<sup>11</sup>

There is, I think, a final sense in which we experience the effects of original sin that goes right to the core, and may in fact be the underlying ground, of all the experiences associated with original sin but which is not self-evident in our ordinary everyday life experience. There is often in our experience of the world an underlying presupposition that the world is about us and revolves around us. We are not measured by the world or reality, but rather, we are the measure and expression of judgments of goodness and badness, of truth and falsity: 'Of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.' (Protagoras, Fr. 1).<sup>12</sup> What, then, does this ancient Sophist claim have to do with our experiences of the effects of original sin? Compare for a moment the belief that humans are the measure of all things to Heraclitus' dismissal of human conceptions of truth, beauty, goodness and justice: 'To the divine, all things are beautiful, good, and just, but men have assumed some things to be unjust, others just.' (Heraclitus, Fr. 102).<sup>13</sup> What is fundamentally at stake here is the root of all of the experiences of the effects of original sin mentioned thus far: when we become the measure of all things, the measure of all things becomes failure (our own or the world's), and the world becomes something to be judged by our own appetites, desires, and emotions. However, the real world never lives up to our expectations and we therein experience the world as wrong: selfish, violent, a realm of survival in a harsh and unforgiving environment, and ultimately a place of chaos and destruction. In sum, where humans become the measure of all things we experience ourselves and the world as fallen: we have been exiled from our imagined utopian garden of Eden – a paradise that expresses the satisfaction of our own appetites, desires, and emotions - and we are cast out into a world of death, hardship, and suffering.

THOMAS AQUINAS' ACCOUNT OF ORIGINAL SIN

Thomas Aquinas provides us with three different accounts of original sin in his mature works: one in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259-1265), another in his *Disputation on Evil* (completed around 1268), and another in his *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1273).<sup>14</sup> In each case, the pedagogical context and intent of the discussion is somewhat different. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* the context of Thomas' account of original sin is culpability, the necessity of salvation, and the suitability of the incarnation.<sup>15</sup> In *De Malo* (on Evil) the question of evil is posed in the context of a universe created by a good God.<sup>16</sup> In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas considers original sin within the context of a discussion of the causes of sin within the broader context of a discussion of habits.<sup>17</sup> For all the diversity of pedagogical approaches, in each case Thomas arrives at the same conclusion regarding original sin, and importantly for the purposes of this paper, provides essentially the same account of the effects of original sin. In what immediately follows, the paper will briefly provide an overview of Thomas' account of original sin and the essential features of the effects of original sin. This account, taken in conjunction with our everyday experiences of the effects of original sin, will then serve as the basis for the consideration of the implications of the effects of original sin for philosophy in the third and final section of the paper.

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* the discussion of original sin takes place specifically within the context of the suitability of the incarnation, and as such, the focal point of the account is the need for the remission of sin, even in infants who have not yet personally sinned.<sup>18</sup> In turn, the main objection to which Thomas must respond is the claim that sin, as an act of the will, cannot be transmitted and therefore that it is unreasonable to think original sin true.<sup>19</sup> In providing his response to this objection Thomas is also careful to avoid the obvious and appealing (but problematic) notion that original sin is solely passed down through procreation.<sup>20</sup> In his response Thomas, without mentioning it by name, provides an account of a state of original justice in which the rational soul ruled and measured all of the powers and activities of the human body.<sup>21</sup> Original sin in this context is defined essentially as the 'turning away' of the human intellect from subjection to God: 'when reason turned away from God, not only did the inferior powers rebel from reason, but the body also sustained passions contrary to

that life which is from the soul.<sup>22</sup> In answer to the objections, Thomas argues that original sin was not merely the sin of an individual person, but rather, through Adam original sin constitutes a sin of nature: 'Thus, then, the sin of the first man... was not only personal in that it deprived the first man of his own good, but natural also in that it deprived him and consequently his descendants of the benefit bestowed on the entire human nature.'<sup>23</sup>

We find the same definition of original sin in the *De Malo*: 'as a turning away from God' and 'turning away from the immutable good'<sup>24</sup> and in the *Summa Theologiae*: the turning of the will away from God.<sup>25</sup> Original sin, as such, is primarily understood in relation to the state of original justice: "whereby the body was subjected to the soul, so long as the soul remained subject to God."<sup>26</sup> According to Thomas, original sin is essentially the turning away of the intellectual soul from proper subservience to God (and thus to reality, truth, goodness, and unity\integrity). The definitions of original sin in these later works, however, add to the original definition a qualification regarding the nature of original sin. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Thomas' definition included a broad reference to 'reason' and the intellectual soul, whilst in the *De Malo* and *Summa Theologiae* Thomas is quite careful to specifically locate original sin in the power of the will: '... among the higher powers that incur the defect... there is one that moves all the others, namely, the will, and the will moves all the other powers to their own acts... so the lack of original justice regards the will, and the proneness to desire inordinately, which we may call concupiscence, regards the lower powers moved by the will.'<sup>27</sup> Thus, original sin is "an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice."<sup>28</sup> In the reply to objection 1 in the same article, Thomas writes: "Original sin denotes the privation of original justice, and besides this, the inordinate disposition of the parts of the soul",<sup>29</sup> and in the following reply: "... original sin, being the sin of nature, is an inordinate disposition of nature..."<sup>30</sup>

At the outset, then, we can see that for Thomas the essential effects of original sin will be a loss of original justice (the right internal ordering of the soul) and a disordering and weakening of human nature, particularly the will: "... when reason turned away from God, not only did the inferior powers

rebel from reason, but the body also sustained passions contrary to that life which is from the soul.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Thomas writes: “Accordingly the privation of original justice, whereby the will was made subject to God, is the formal element in original sin, while every other disorder of the soul's powers, is a kind of material element in respect of original sin. Now the inordinateness of the other powers of the soul consists chiefly in their turning inordinately to mutable good, which inordinateness may be called by the general name of concupiscence. Hence original sin is concupiscence, materially, but privation of original justice, formally.”<sup>32</sup>

It is important to note at this point that original sin does not, in Thomas’ arguments at least, destroy the human capacity for philosophical investigation of universal and transcendent truth or our capacity for virtue. Reason is still able to know what original justice as an interior right ordering of the soul is, even if we are no longer able to achieve it easily or perfectly. Indeed, Thomas’ account of original justice and infused justice are a mirror of Plato’s account of justice and Aristotle’s definition of metaphorical interior justice.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Thomas’ account of original sin does not imply that human nature is no longer good (inasmuch as by nature we mean a desire for the good or the principles that we move towards fulfilling by nature). Rather, the effects of original sin appear primarily to be a disruption, deprivation, or dysfunction in our intellectual powers, particularly the will, and a tendency towards enslavement to concupiscence. Finally, original sin is not a disposition to evil, as if evil were something positive, but rather an inordinate disposition to merely immediate or physical goods at the expense of transcendent and/or final good(s).

We can extract from Thomas’ accounts of original sin four primary features of the effects of original sin. The first and foremost effect of original sin, according to Thomas Aquinas, is the loss of original justice. Original justice, on this account, contained two interrelated key features: a) the subjection of the human will to God (and therein to reality, to truth, to goodness, etc...), which in turn was the ground for b) the proper ordering of the soul in which the intellect, both reason and will, appropriately ruled, measured, unified, and ordered all of the powers of the soul. Original justice, according to

Thomas, was a gift from God by which human reason was capable of ruling the other powers of the soul and the soul capable of ruling the body without having to learn to do so, and in particular, without having to acquire good habits (virtues).<sup>34</sup> Thus, when original justice is lost there is a corresponding loss of internal ordering of the soul and, in the absence of a will that directs reason to ruling and ordering appropriately, a requirement for humans to acquire virtues that moderate the powers of the soul (and in effect bolster the strength of the will). The loss of original justice does not destroy human nature or the powers of the soul, but rather, leaves humanity ignorant (thus requiring formation) and subject to the passions (and thus predisposed towards concupiscence and in need of external law to rule and measure us).<sup>35</sup>

It is clear from Thomas' definition of original sin that the second effect of original sin that follows immediately from the loss of original justice is the weakening of the will, in particular, a will that is predisposed towards submission to, and thus slavery to, transient goods and equally, away from appropriate ordering towards universal and transcendent goods.<sup>36</sup> In this way, Thomas argues, when humans turned away from God the body and powers of the soul rebelled against the will.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, this weakening of the will and the corresponding subjection of the will to mutable goods is the ground of the disordering of all of the powers of the soul.<sup>38</sup> It is the weakness of the will, as an essential feature of the effects of original sin, which therefore inclines and predisposes humans to morally bad action.<sup>39</sup> Thomas puts it this way in his *Commentary on Romans*: '... after man's mind was turned from God through (original) sin, he lost the strength to control the lower powers as well as the body and external things.'<sup>40</sup>

With this loss of strength, as Thomas Aquinas puts it, humans became subject to death.<sup>41</sup> Thomas does not claim here that death is unnatural, but rather, that original justice perfected human nature in such a way that death was not necessary for humans. With the loss of original justice and the weakening of the will, there is a corresponding disordering of the powers of human nature. It is this disordering of the soul more than anything else which subjects humans to death inasmuch as a disordered soul tends

more to a lack of self-rule and ordering, self-destructive actions, and equally, in a community of disordered souls, to death by external violence.

With the disordering of the powers of the soul, and by the weakening of the will particularly, humans come to be predisposed towards subservience to concupiscence. Concupiscence, the desire for that which is pleasant or pleasure giving,<sup>42</sup> is not in and of itself an inclination to evil, but rather, an inclination towards goods of the senses and the body. However, with the weakening of the will and the disordering of the soul, concupiscence comes to dominate the will, thus inclining humans to act disproportionately for the sake of sex and touch rather than for the sake of intellectual goods, those goods proper to our nature as rational animals.<sup>43</sup> In this way, the inclination to be ruled and measured by concupiscence comes to be called the 'fomes of sin': ... when man turned his back on God, he fell under the influence of his sensual impulses: in fact this happens to each one individually, the more he deviates from the path of reason...' and in this way humans tend to become slaves to our bodily passions as if they are a law to us.<sup>44</sup>

There are then, I would suggest, two crucial elements to the effects of original sin in Thomas Aquinas' account: first, the turning of the will away from God, and in Thomas' way of thinking, a tendency of the will to a turning away from reality itself to some degree, and secondly, all of the side-effects of this turning away: the weakening of the will, the disordering of the powers of the soul, and the dominance of concupiscence.<sup>45</sup> The effect of original sin is not the destruction of human nature but rather the loss of original justice. The essential feature of the loss of original justice is a tendency, I would argue, for the human will to be inclined or predisposed to make itself the measure of all things, making of our own will and our sense of self a god of sorts, corresponding to a turning away from measuring ourselves in accord with reality. All the other effects of original sin follow from this first turning away from God. We cannot say, on the basis of Thomas Aquinas' account of original sin, however, that the effect of original sin is a corruption of the individual intellectual soul or the power

of reason to get to the truth, the person directly created by God at conception, but is rather a corruption of the powers of the soul qua human nature.<sup>46</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR DOING PHILOSOPHY

It seems to me fairly obvious that whether one believes that original sin is true or not, or indeed whether one believes that God is real or not, the effects of what gets called original sin have a real presence in human life. Once it is conceded that the effects of what gets called original sin are real, then it also immediately follows that they will have some kind of implication for doing philosophy and perhaps even indicate the kind of philosophical activities and arguments that are implicated in willing participation in these effects. In what immediately follows I will focus on merely testing out some of the broadest implications of the reality of the effects of what gets called original sin for doing philosophy. However, an objection to this argument needs to be briefly recognised and addressed.

An immediate objection to the claims of the paper thus far, particularly the claim that the effects of what gets called original sin are evident in human life and thus must have implications for doing philosophy, is the opinion implicit in a great deal of modern philosophy, and to some extent post-enlightenment philosophy,<sup>47</sup> that these so called effects of original sin are merely the human condition and entirely natural, and therefore, that we ought approach philosophy and morality on this basis. On this view we also ought to reject the classical and medieval account of the goodness of the cosmos, nature in general, and in particular, the goodness of human nature.

In answer to this objection, I think it only necessary to briefly outline two replies. The first is to take Alasdair MacIntyre's tactic in *After Virtue* and follow his argument to the conclusion that the enlightenment project is doomed to fail inasmuch as it is a self-contradicting system of thought, the attempt to find purely rational and autonomous non-teleological grounds for a moral position that implicitly rests on both teleology and a particular theological conception of original sin that makes

reason impotent, and equally, denies what is self-evident in every thought about and desire for the good.<sup>48</sup>

A second reply, and one that grounds the first, comes out of the first line of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the good is that which all things aim.'<sup>49</sup> Everything humans intentionally do presupposes, and is only intelligible, inasmuch as those actions aim at some end believed good (that is: a desirable intelligible end of action).<sup>50</sup> Thus, even if we feel obliged by the natural sciences to reject natural teleology, we nonetheless cannot remove the fundamentally teleological nature of human practical reason, including the desire for truth that ultimately grounds and explains the natural sciences as a form of inquiry. In this, the effects of original sin, inasmuch as they express a predisposition to act in a way contrary to what we believe good (the desirable intelligible goals of action), must necessarily be treated as a real set of phenomena which will also have real effects on our capacity to pursue and attain those ends of philosophy believed good.

There are two ways, I would suggest, of teasing out the broad implications of the effects of original sin for philosophy: the first inasmuch as the phenomena affect the operations of reason, the second inasmuch as the phenomena associated with original sin affect our will and therein shape our dispositions towards the goals at stake in philosophy. With regard to the first, it is important to consider the possible effects of concupiscence on philosophy, the problem of post-hoc rationalisation, and the weakening of the will in relation to philosophical theory construction. With regard to the latter, it will be important to tackle the problem for philosophy of the turning of the will away from reality towards measuring everything in accord with our own will.

The first implication of the effects of original sin for philosophy arises inasmuch as the phenomena associated with original sin affect the operations of reason and this in three main ways. To begin with we can ask: how does the disordering of the powers of the body and soul and reason affect the operations of reason? In other words, how does concupiscence affect philosophy? The answer, I think,

is that philosophy is at times marked out by a tendency to settle for immediate and finite goods and truths. The implication here is that where philosophy settles for that which is merely immanent and finite, it then finds itself mired in difference and apparent paradox, unable to explain its desire for goodness or truth or integrity, or more generally, that which unifies and orders. Moreover, a philosopher who settles for that which is only immediately and finitely true and good must eventually deny the very basis both of their own desire for the truth and the basic rules of thinking itself. It is this implication of the effects of original sin, I would suggest, that we find in Plato's allegory of the cave and his rejection of Sophism. Proper intellectual formation, as the cave allegory illustrates, involves the movement of the soul from a slavery to the sensuous, and therein the appearance of relativity and difference, towards the realisation of the goals of the intellect: universal principles and causes.<sup>51</sup>

Insofar as humans are reasoning animals we can't but help seek the truth, and if we are honest with ourselves, appreciate the goodness of attaining the truth.<sup>52</sup> However, where we become enslaved to immediate and finite truths and goods, we find ourselves immediately mired in internal conflict between a predisposition towards universal truths and a tendency towards only finite truth. Where we accede to finite truth we inevitably find ourselves also engaged in post-hoc rationalisation of the merely immediately true. In an analogous way to the example of chocolate (or watching television episodes) from the first section of the paper, settling for the merely finitely true immediately puts us into a state of internal tension with what we truly desire, universal and transcendent truth. Likewise, as we reconcile ourselves to the activity of seeking only finite truths we must also inevitably attempt to rationalise away our desire for universal and transcendental truth: 'finite truth is the best we can really hope for', 'there really isn't such a thing as universal truth', 'even though I desire transcendent truth, it seems impossible or too hard for me to achieve, so I will deny its possibility'.

Inasmuch as the effects of original sin affect the operations of reason, it is also important to recognise how the weakening of the will often leads to the construction of theories that are detached from the reality of our nature. This is particularly evident in philosophical accounts of human nature that

emphasise the merely immediate and empirical aspects of human nature to the detriment (and even denial) of the intellectual features of our nature. This, I think, gives rise to the theory-practice divide that so strongly haunts contemporary thought inasmuch as theory, which tends to focus either on mere description or cause-effect explanation, is almost entirely disconnected from the everyday practices of human living which are one and all teleological. This disconnection of theory and practice then tends to disconnect philosophical thought from the reality of ordinary human life, and in turn, the way reality is encountered by humans.

Another tangible way in which the effects of original sin can be seen in philosophy is the tendency of philosophers to reject or deny particular forms of authority. The rejection of authority can be seen in philosophical accounts of human nature and morality that deny the authority of reason, whether that be a rejection of the teleological nature of being human or the authority of practical reason in moral decision making. It can also be seen in more recent philosophical accounts of metaphysics and logic that deny the authority and reality of the principle of non-contradiction or the difference between being and not-being.<sup>53</sup> This denial of authority can be seen, finally, in philosophical systems in which the basic rules of reason and reality are no longer thought to have authority over what philosophers argue or think to be true.

At the core of the phenomena associated with the effects of original sin there is to be found a disposition of the will to turn away from the proper objects of reason and to interpret reality by our own measure. Thomas Aquinas writes of this as a turning away from God, but it is just as much a matter of the will making a god of itself and judging reality by its own desires and appetites. There are three implications for philosophy worth briefly mentioning in this respect. The predisposition of the will to turn its back on reality (and conversely: to make itself the measure of all things) would suggest that there will be times that philosophers fall into the trap of measuring reality by their own immediate desires and preferences, and will tend towards claiming that reality is fundamentally evil based upon their own judgment that all suffering or pain is wrong because they are contrary to our will. There will

also be a tendency for philosophers to produce accounts of reality which are completely detached from the way reality actually is, and will do so on the basis of certain theoretical assumptions that they are committed to which are supported primarily by their will or preference for it to be so.<sup>54</sup>

Since the start of the enlightenment period, philosophers tended towards either a dogmatic god complex (to use Kantian terms), e.g., those of the continental rationalist tradition, or towards a denial of the existence of God and/or the transcendent, e.g., the empiricist/naturalist tradition. At the same time, there has been a growing crisis in philosophy regarding the theoretical divide between the thinking subject and the objects of thought and a growing scepticism regarding our ability to know reality. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* intended to respond to these divisions and tensions of the enlightenment period but in doing so came to the conclusion that human reason is the rule and measure of all objective knowledge (the Copernican Revolution), and additionally, that philosophy is constituted by a natural desire for the answer to questions regarding transcendent truths that it cannot actually answer.<sup>55</sup> Kant's solution to the problems of enlightenment philosophy, whilst reasonable from the point of view of the enlightenment itself, weren't particularly satisfying and only exacerbated the sense that philosophy was becoming disconnected from reality.<sup>56</sup>

As is common knowledge, philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the seemingly contradictory schools of analytical and continental philosophy. That there are two apparently contradictory approaches to philosophy does nothing to ease the sense that philosophy is in crisis or dying as a result of becoming a merely theoretical solipsistic naval gazing. There are various explanations for this sense of crisis. However, for the purposes of this paper it is worth, by way of conclusion, re-interpreting this sense of crisis as an expression of phenomena associated with the effects of original sin. The essence of original sin according to Thomas Aquinas is a turning away from God and as a side effect of this a turning away of the will, and reason directed by the will, from reality. In this sense, it seems quite reasonable to think that the very notions of subjectivity and objectivity, the division between empiricist naturalism; which measures reality via calculative logic and our sense experience and a faith

in naturalism, and continental philosophy; which measures reality via the ontology of human immanent subjectivity, and the current significant problems we face regarding contradictory approaches to moral issues are all just philosophical expressions of a turning of reason away from reality.<sup>57</sup> When philosophers forgot about the propensity of the will to turn away from reality they came to accept this turning away as natural and in doing so became more and more predisposed to deny the reality of the transcendental goals of philosophy. At the same time, philosophers have also tended to forget that these goals are not a mere product of our nature or a feature of our own being or even some metaphysical illusion. As William Desmond notes, the twentieth century – and indeed the entirety of modern philosophy – has been marked by the ‘presiding god of... autonomy’.<sup>58</sup> But what is this but the making a god of our own will and a refusal to submit to reality as it actually is?

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (St. Paul’s Publications, 2009), p.100-101.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr as cited by Edward T. Oakes, ‘Original Sin: A Disputation’, *First Things*, NOVEMBER 1998, p.20.

<sup>3</sup> St Paul, Romans, 7:14-20, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, Pauline Matarasso (Trans.) (Penguin Books, 2005), pp.85-86

<sup>5</sup> Heraclitus, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Heraclitus, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1996), p.30

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Black Cat’, as quoted by Ronald Paulson, *Sin and Evil: Moral Values in Literature* (Yale University Press, 2007), p.261.

<sup>8</sup> STEPHEN J. DUFFY, ‘Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited’, *Theological Studies*, 49, 1988, p.606

<sup>9</sup> STEPHEN J. DUFFY, ‘Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited’, *Theological Studies*, 49, 1988, p.606

<sup>10</sup> Edward T. Oakes, ‘Original Sin: A Disputation’, *First Things*, NOVEMBER 1998, p.20

<sup>11</sup> STEPHEN J. DUFFY, ‘Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited’, *Theological Studies*, 49, 1988, p.606

<sup>12</sup> Protagoras, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1996), p.125

<sup>13</sup> Heraclitus, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1996), p.31

<sup>14</sup> I am taking the dates of authorship for these texts from Brian Davies ‘introduction’ to Thomas Aquinas’, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4: Salvation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 212. See also: Mark Johnson, ‘Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin’, Dauphinais, David, and Levering, eds., *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007); SEAN A. OTTO, ‘FELIX CULPA: THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN AS DOCTRINE OF HOPE IN AQUINAS’S SUMMA CONTRA GENTILES’, *Heythrop Journal*, (2009), pp. 781–792

<sup>16</sup> Brian Davies, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.14-15.

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- <sup>17</sup> Oswin Magrath, 'St. Thomas' Theory of Original Sin', *Thomist : a Speculative Quarterly Review*, Jan 1, 1953, p.179; see also: Mark Johnson, 'Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin', Dauphinais, Michael, David, Barry, and Levering, Matthew, (eds.) *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 147-149.
- <sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 212-214.
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 215.
- <sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 216.
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 218.
- <sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 218-219.
- <sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 220.
- <sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.204-5
- <sup>25</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.82, Art.3
- <sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.81, Art.5
- <sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.205.
- <sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.82, Article 1, Answer
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Reply Objection 1
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Reply Objection 2
- <sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 4: Salvation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), chapter 52, pp.218-219
- <sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.82, Article 3. Answer
- <sup>33</sup> See for example: St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q.113, Article 1, Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, II-II, Q.58, Article 2, Plato, Republic, 441d-442c, Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV, Chapter 11 (1138<sup>b</sup>7-1138<sup>b</sup>13), Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, II-II, Q.58, Article 2: Reply Objection 2*
- <sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.197.
- <sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.82, Article 3, Reply objections 1-3.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.204, see also: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.82, Article 3
- <sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Richard Regan (trans.) (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.205.
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.82, Article 3
- <sup>39</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.83, Article 3
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, F.R. Larcher, O.P (trans.) (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2012), p.141.
- <sup>41</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, p.141.
- <sup>42</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.30, Article 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.83, Article 4.
- <sup>44</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.91, Article 6.
- <sup>45</sup> Oswin Magrath, 'St. Thomas' Theory of Original Sin', *The Thomist*, Vol. XVI, April 1953, issue 2, p.164
- <sup>46</sup> Mark Johnson, 'Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin', Dauphinais, David, and Levering, eds., *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp.153-157.
- <sup>47</sup> See for example: Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Ralph McInerny, *A Student's Guide to Philosophy* (ISI Books, 1999)
- <sup>48</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Bloomsbury, 2013), chapter 5. See also: Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton University Press, 2007), p.11.
- <sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Harvard University Press, 1934), p.3.
- <sup>50</sup> Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas on Human Action* (Catholic University of America Press, 1992), pp.56-57; Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Harvard University Press, 2008), p.149.
- <sup>51</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII
- <sup>52</sup> John Finnis, *Natural Law & Natural Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.72-74.
- <sup>53</sup> See for example: Hegel, *Science of Logic*, J.N. Findlay (trans.)(Humanity Books, 1969), pp.82-83; Frederick Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann (trans.)(New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p.279.
- <sup>54</sup> I am thinking here, some would say unfairly, of the metaphysical position of David Lewis who was committed to 'Humean Supervenience' and the truth of infinite possible worlds because of his prior commitment to empiricism and naturalism which he held on the basis of personal opinion. See: Alasdair MacIntyre, 'On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century', *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), p.18
- <sup>55</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (MacMillan Education, 1990), Preface A and B.
- <sup>56</sup> See for example: Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*

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<sup>57</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: an essay on desire, practical reason, and narrative*

<sup>58</sup> William Desmond, 'Ethics and the Evil of Being', *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), p.423.