

QUESTION 82

The Essence of Original Sin

Next we have to consider original sin with respect to its essence.

On this topic there are four questions: (1) Is original sin a habit (*habitus*)? (2) Is original sin just a single thing in an individual man (*unum tantum in uno homine*)? (3) Is original sin concupiscence (*utrum sit concupiscentia*)? (4) Does original sin exist equally in everyone?

Article 1

Is original sin a habit?

It seems that original sin is not a habit (*non sit habitus*):

Objection 1: As Anselm says in *De Conceptu Virginali*, original sin is a lack of original justice, and so original sin is a certain privation. But *privation* is opposed to *habit*. Therefore, original sin is not a habit.

Objection 2: Actual sin has more of the character of guilt (*plus de ratione culpae*) than does original sin, insofar as it has more of the character of voluntariness. But the habit of an actual sin does not have the character of guilt. Otherwise, it would follow that a sleeping man would be culpably sinning. Therefore, no original habit has the character of guilt.

Objection 3: In the case of what is bad, the act always precedes the habit, since every bad habit is acquired and no bad habit is infused. But no act precedes original sin. Therefore, original sin is not a habit.

But contrary to this: In *De Baptismo Puerorum* Augustine says that because of original sin, children have an aptitude for concupiscence, even though they are not actually desiring anything in a disordered way (*sunt concupiscibiles etsi non sint actu concupiscentes*). But 'aptitude' (*habilitas*) is predicated because of some habit. Therefore, original sin is a habit.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 49, a. 4 and q. 50, a. 1), there are two sorts of habits.

One sort of habit is that by which a power is inclined toward acting—in the way that the virtues and the types of scientific knowledge are called habits. And in this sense original sin is not a habit.

The second sort of habit is a disposition of a nature composed of many parts, in accord with which one is disposed to something either well or badly—especially when the disposition in question has become something like a nature, as is clear in the case of sickness and health. And this is the sense in which original sin is a habit.

For there is a certain disordered disposition that results from the dissolution of the harmony that the nature of original justice consisted in, just as bodily sickness is likewise a certain disordered bodily disposition which dissolves the equilibrium that the nature of health consists in (*solvitur aequalitas in qua consistit ratio sanitatis*). This is why original sin is called a feebleness on the part of the nature (*languor naturae*).

Reply to objection 1: Just as bodily sickness has (a) something of the character of a *privation*, insofar as the equilibrium of health is taken away, and (b) something *positive*, viz., the humors themselves that are disposed in a disordered way, so, too, original sin has (a) the privation of original justice and (b), along with it, a disordered disposition of the parts of the soul. Hence, it is not a pure privation, but is instead a certain corrupt habit.

Reply to objection 2: An actual sin is a certain disordered *act*, whereas original sin, since it is a sin of the nature, is a certain disordered *disposition* of the nature itself that has the character of guilt insofar as it is derived from the first parent; this was explained above (q. 81, a. 1). Now this sort of disordered disposition on the part of the nature has the character of a habit, whereas a disordered disposition on the part of an act does not have the character of a habit. Because of this, original sin, but

not actual sin, is able to be a habit.

Reply to objection 3: This objection goes through for the case of a habit by which a power is inclined toward acting. But original sin is not this sort of habit.

Moreover, even though an inclination toward a disordered act follows from original sin, it follows *indirectly* and not directly, viz., through the removal of something that had prevented it, i.e., original justice, which had prevented the disordered movements—in the same way that an inclination toward disordered bodily movements follows indirectly from sickness.

Nor does one have to claim that original sin is an infused habit or that it is a habit acquired through an act (unless the act belongs to the first parent and not to *this* person). Instead, one should claim that it is a habit that is innate because of a corrupted origin.

Article 2

Are there many original sins in a single man?

It seems that there are many original sins in a single man (*in uno homine sint multa originalia peccata*):

Objection 1: Psalm 1:7 says, “Behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins my mother conceived me.” But a sin in which a man is conceived is an original sin. Therefore, there are many original sins in a single man.

Objection 2: One and the same habit does not give an inclination toward contraries, since a habit gives an inclination in the manner of a nature, which tends toward a single thing. But original sin, even in a single man, gives an inclination toward diverse and contrary sins. Therefore, original sin is many habits and not just a single habit.

Objection 3: Original sin infects all the parts of the soul. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 74), the diverse parts of the soul are diverse subjects of sin. Therefore, since a single sin cannot exist in diverse subjects, it seems that original sin is many sins and not just one sin.

But contrary to this: John 1:29 says, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” As a Gloss on this passage explains, ‘sin’ is expressed in the singular because the sin of the world, which is original sin, is a single sin.

I respond: In a single man there is a single original sin. The reason for this can be taken from two sources:

First, on the part of the *cause* of original sin. For it was explained above (q. 81, a. 2) that only the first sin of the first parent is passed down to his descendants. Hence, in a single man original sin is numerically one sin, and in all men it is relationally one (*unum proportione*), viz., with respect to the first principle.

In the second way, the reason can be taken from the very *essence* of original sin. For in the case of every disordered disposition, oneness species is taken from the cause, whereas numerical oneness is taken from the subject. This is clear in the case of bodily illness. For illnesses are diverse in species when they proceed from diverse causes, for instance, from an excess of heat or of cold, or from a lesion in the lung or in the liver; however, a sickness that is one in species exists in a single man only as numerically one sickness. Now there is only a single cause of the corrupt disposition which is called original sin, viz., the privation of original justice that removes the human mind’s subjection to God. And so original sin is one in species. And in a single man it can only be numerically one, whereas in different men it is one in species and relationally one, but numerically diverse.

Reply to objection 1: The plural is used to talk about sins in keeping with the custom of divine Scripture, in which the grammatical plural is frequently used for the singular, as in Matthew 2 (“They are

dead who sought the life of the child”).

An alternative reply is that the plural is used because all actual sins virtually pre-exist in original sin as in a sort of principle that is manifold in its power.

Alternatively, the plural is used because in the sin of the first parent that is handed down by way of origin there were many deformities, viz., pride, disobedience, gluttony, and others of this sort.

Alternatively, the plural is used because many parts of the soul are infected by original sin.

Reply to objection 2: A single habit cannot give an inclination to contraries *per se* and directly, i.e., through its own form.

However, nothing prevents it from giving an inclination to contraries indirectly and *per accidens*, viz., through the removal of an obstacle. For instance, when the equilibrium (*harmonia*) of a mixed body is dissolved, the elements tend toward contrary places. Similarly, when the equilibrium of original justice is dissolved, the diverse powers of the soul are moved in different directions (*diversa animae potentiae in diversa feruntur*).

Reply to objection 3: Original sin infects the diverse parts of the soul insofar as they are parts of a single whole, just as original justice holds all the parts of the soul together as a single whole. And this is why original sin is a just a single sin. In the same way, there is a single fever in a single man, even though diverse parts of the body are burdened.

Article 3

Is original sin concupiscence or disordered desire?

It seems that original sin is not concupiscence or disordered desire (*peccatum originale non sit concupiscentia*):

Objection 1: As Damascene says in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2, every sin is contrary to nature. But concupiscence is in accord with nature, since it is the proper act of the concupiscible power (*proprius actus virtutis concupiscibilis*), which is a natural power (*potentia naturalis*). Therefore, original sin is not concupiscence.

Objection 2: Because of original sin “the passions of the sins” exist in us, as is clear from the Apostle in Romans 7:5. But as was established above (q. 23, a. 4), there are many passions besides concupiscence. Therefore, it is not the case that original sin is concupiscence more than any other passion.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 2), all the parts of the soul are disordered because of original sin. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 10, the intellect is the highest among the parts of the soul. Therefore, original sin is ignorance rather than concupiscence.

But contrary to this: In *Retractationes* Augustine says, “Concupiscence is the guilt that belongs to original sin (*est reatus originalis peccati*).”

I respond: Each thing has its species from its form. Now it was explained above (a. 2) that the species of original sin is taken from its cause. Hence, it must be the case that what is formal in original sin is taken from the cause of original sin. But opposites are causes of opposites. Thus, the cause of original sin must be inferred from the cause of original justice, which is opposed to original sin.

Now the entire order of original justice stems from the fact that man’s will was subject to God. This subjection was primarily and mainly through the will, the role of which, as was explained above (q. 9, a. 1), is to move all the other parts toward their end. Hence, what followed from the turning of the will away from God was disorder in all the other powers of the soul. So, then, the privation of original justice, through which the will had been subject to God, is what is *formal* in original sin, whereas all the other disorders in the powers of the soul are, as it were, what is *material* in original sin.

Now the disorder in the other powers of the soul consists mainly in their being turned in a disordered way toward changeable goods, and this disorder can be called by the general name ‘concupiscence’. And so, materially speaking, original sin is indeed concupiscence, but, formally speaking, it is the lack of original justice.

Reply to objection 1: Since the concupiscible power in man is naturally ruled by reason, man’s desires are natural to the extent that they are in accord with the order of reason (*intantum concupiscere est homini naturale inquantum est secundum rationis ordinem*).

However, concupiscence that transgresses the limits of reason is contrary to nature for man. And this is the sort of concupiscence that belongs to original sin.

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above (q. 25, a. 1), all the passions of the irascible power are traced back to passions of the concupiscible power as to the more principal passions. And as was established above (q. 25, a. 2), among the passions of the concupiscible power, concupiscence or desire effects movements that are stronger and more felt. And so [original sin] is attributed to concupiscence as the more principal passion and the one in which all the other passions are in some sense included.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 77, aa. 1 and 2, and q. 80, a. 2), in good things the intellect and reason have primacy (*principalitatem habent*), whereas, conversely, in evil things the lower part of the soul, which clouds and seduces reason, is the more principal. Because of this, original sin is said to be concupiscence rather than ignorance, even though ignorance is likewise contained among the material defects of original sin.

Article 4

Does original sin exist equally in everyone?

It seems that original sin does not exist equally in everyone:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 3), original sin is disordered desire (*concupiscentia inordinata*). But it is not the case that everyone is equally prone to desire in a disordered way. Therefore, original sin does not exist equally in everyone.

Objection 2: Original sin is a certain disordered disposition on the part of the soul, in the same way that sickness is a certain disordered disposition on the part of the body. But sickness admits of more and less. Therefore, original sin admits of more and less.

Objection 3: In *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia* Augustine says, “Disordered sexual desire (*libido*) transmits original sin to the child.” But one individual can have a more disordered sexual desire than another does in an act of generation. Therefore, original sin can be greater in one individual than in another.

But contrary to this: As has been explained (q. 81, a. 1), original sin is a sin of the nature. But the nature exists equally in everyone. Therefore, so does original sin.

I respond: There are two aspects of original sin, one of which is the lack of original justice and the other of which is the relation of this defect to the sin of the first parent, from whom it is transmitted through a corrupted origin.

As for the first, original sin does not admit of more and less, since the whole gift of original justice has been taken away, and privations which take away something in its entirety, e.g., death and utter darkness (*tenebrae*), do not admit of more and less. This was explained above (q. 73, a. 2).

The second aspect likewise does not admit of more and less, since everyone is related equally to the first principle of the corrupted origin, from which original sin receives the character of guilt. For relations do not admit of more and less.

Hence, it is clear that original sin cannot exist more in one individual than in another.

Reply to objection 1: The bond of original justice held all the powers of the soul together under itself in a certain order. Once this bond was broken, each of the powers of the soul tended toward its own proper movement, and the stronger the power, the more vehement the movement. Now it is possible for some of the powers of the soul to be stronger in one individual than in another, because of their different bodily compositions (*propter diversas corporis complexiones*). Therefore, the fact that one man is more prone to disordered desire than another does not stem from original sin, since in everyone the bond of original justice is equally broken and in everyone the lower parts of the soul are equally left to themselves. Rather, as has been explained, this occurs because of the diverse dispositions of the powers.

Reply to objection 2: Bodily sickness does not have an equal cause in everyone, even if the sicknesses are of the same species; for instance, if there is a fever because of corrupted bile (*ex cholera putrefacta*), the corruption can be greater or lesser, and it can be closer to or further removed from the principle of life. But the cause of original sin is equal in everyone. Hence, the cases are not parallel.

Reply to objection 3: The disordered sexual desire (*libido*) that transmits original sin to the child is not *actual* disordered sexual desire, since even if by God's power it were granted to someone that he should feel no disordered desire in the act of generation, he would still transmit original sin to his child.

Rather, the disordered sexual desire in question should be understood to be *habitual* in the sense that the sentient appetite is not now tied to reason by the bond of original justice. And disordered sexual desire in this sense is equal in everyone.