



Aquinas at 800 – Papers from the 2024 Notre Dame Conference

The Fittingness of Including Animals in the Glorified Universe

Jennifer Hart Weed (*The University of New Brunswick*)

Abstract

In this paper, I examine Aquinas's arguments for the absence of animals in the glorified universe. In my response, I turn to Aquinas's account of fittingness with respect to God's nature, utilizing this account to argue that it befits God for some animals to exist in the glorified universe and to be ordered to Him as the final cause. I raise and resolve several potential Aquinian objections to this conclusion and I offer three possible, interrelated reasons as to why God might include animals. In conclusion, I present three additional theological considerations that accord with my conclusion.

EJSTA 43 (2025)

DOI:

10.2478/ejsta-2025-0004

Article history:

Received: 19.11.2024

Accepted: 2.5.2025

Available online:

8.12.2025

Keywords

animals • eschatology • eternal life

In contemporary secondary literature, some attention has been paid to Aquinas's views on the treatment of animals.¹ Less attention has been paid to his arguments that animals are excluded from the afterlife. Carlo Leget includes a discussion of this subject in his book, arguing that Aquinas thinks plants and animals cease to be in the glorified universe since their service to human beings is no longer necessary and since the old world "passes away".²

In this paper, I examine Aquinas's arguments for the absence of animals in the glorified universe. In my response, I turn to Aquinas's account of fittingness with respect to God's nature, utilizing this account to argue that it befits God for some animals to exist in the glorified universe and to be ordered to Him as the final cause. I raise and resolve several potential Aquinian objections to this conclusion and I offer three possible, interrelated reasons as to why God might include animals. I end the

¹ See, for example, J.A. Barad, *Aquinas on the Nature and Treatment of Animals* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1995).

² C. Leget, *Thomas Aquinas on the Relation between Life on Earth and 'Life' after Death* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1997), 231.

paper by presenting three additional theological considerations that accord with my conclusion.

1. Barriers to the Glorified Universe: Corruptibility

Aquinas discusses the renewal of the world in multiple texts, including his *Commentary on the Sentences*, the *Summa contra Gentiles*, the *Summa Theologiae*, the *Compendium Theologiae*, and his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.³ Gilles Emery, O.P. provides a catalogue of Aquinas's works, noting that he stopped writing on 6 December 1273, leaving the *Summa Theologiae* unfinished.⁴

Aquinas is consistent throughout his writings in denying the presence of animals in the renewed world. Consider this early text from the *Sentences* commentary:⁵

Since the world's renewal will occur for the sake of man, it must conform to man's renewal. Now man, renewed from the state of corruption, will pass to incorruption, to the state of perpetual rest, as Scripture says: *this perishable nature must put on the imperishable* (1 Cor 15:53). And thus the world (*mundus*) will be renewed in such a way that, leaving behind all corruption and transmutation, it will remain forever at rest. For this reason, nothing will be able to be ordered to this renewal except what has an order to incorruption. Now this includes the heavenly bodies, the elements, (*elementa*) and men ... Brute animals, plants, minerals, and all mixed bodies, however, are corrupted both in whole and in part, both on the part of matter losing the form and on the part of form that does not remain in act. And so there is no way in which they have an order to incorruption. For this reason, they will not remain in that renewal, but only the things that were stated.

³ Father Bryan Kromholtz, O.P. provides an excellent treatment of Aquinas's writings on this subject in his monograph, *On the Last Day: The Time of the Resurrection of the Dead according to Thomas Aquinas*, *Studia Friburgensia* 110 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Academic Press Fribourg, 2010). I am very grateful to Father Kromholtz for sharing this volume and some of his other publications with me. I am also grateful for his conversations with me on these topics.

⁴ G. Emery, O.P., "Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas", in: J.-P. Torrell O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1. The Person and His Work* Revised edition. Trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 330-360. Emery dates the *Commentary on the Sentences* from 1252-54, noting that Aquinas returned to it at least from 1265-1266. Emery further dates the *Summa contra Gentiles* from 1259-1265, the *Compendium theologiae* from 1265 and returning to it around 1272, and the *Commentary on John* from 1271-1272. Emery further notes that the *Compendium* remained unfinished.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*. IV. d. 48 q. 2 a. 5 co. Trans. Beth Mortensen. Retrieved 24 July 2024 from: <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Sent.IV.D48.Q2.A5>. All quotations of this commentary are from this edition. The Latin text is provided in the same place as a facing page.

In this passage, Aquinas connects the renewal of the world to humanity, such that the world is renewed *for* humanity. The heavenly bodies, the elements, and human beings will be included in this renewal.⁶

In connection with humanity's renewal to incorruption, Aquinas argues that all corruptible things will be excluded from the renewed world. Animals, plants, and minerals are corruptible both with respect to their matter and their forms. While he believes that animals have souls, each of which serves as the form of the animal, he maintains that animal souls are mortal and he devotes an entire chapter in the *Summa contra Gentiles* to defending this view, concluding:⁷

The souls of brutes, then, are incapable of any operation that does not involve the body. Now, since every substance is possessed of some operation, the soul of a brute animal will be unable to exist apart from its body; so that it perishes along with the body.

Aquinas also describes the inextricable link between an animal's body and its soul:⁸

But every form that is initiated through the transmutation (*transmutationem*) of matter is dependent upon matter for its being, since by this means the form is made actual from being potential, and thus the material transmutation issues in the actual being of the matter through its union with the form. Hence, if in this way the form also begins to be simply, then the form will have no being at all except that which accrues to it through being united to a matter; that is to say, the form will be dependent on matter for its being.

With respect to the form or soul of an animal, Aquinas believes that the form is actualized out of the matter. So in the generation of an animal, its soul comes into being as the form of the matter and is entirely dependent on that matter for its existence. This is in contrast to the souls of human beings, which Aquinas believes are immortal and created by God.⁹ The soul of a human being survives the death of the human body, setting the stage for Aquinas's account of the bodily resurrection and the renewal of the world.¹⁰

Aquinas connects the motion of the heavens to corruption and argues that the heavens will cease to move in the glorified universe.¹¹

⁶ *In II Sent.* d. 14 q. 1 a. 2 co. Aquinas identifies the four elements as earth, water, fire, and air.

⁷ *ScG II*, c. 82 n. 2. Trans. James F. Anderson. (New York: Hanover House, 1955-57).

⁸ *ScG II*, c. 86. n. 5. The Latin is from *Commissio Leonina, S. Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici Opera Omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P.M. edita*, Romae 1882-.

⁹ *ScG II*, c. 87 n. 1.

¹⁰ For an excellent extended discussion of this, see Leget, 207-253.

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* c. 6 lect. 5, 939-940. Trans. James A. Weisheipl, O.P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1980).

As to the question why the motion of the heavens and time itself will continue until then, and not end before or after, we should note that whatever exists for something else is differently disposed according to the different states of that for which it exists. But all physical things have been made for man; consequently, they should be disposed according to the different states of man. So, because the state of incorruptibility will begin in men when they arise—according to ‘What is mortal will put on incorruption,’ as it says in *1 Corinthians* (15, 54)—the corruption of things will also stop then. Consequently, the motion of the heavens, which is the cause of the generation and corruption of material things, will stop. ‘Creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the children of God’ (*Romans* 8, 21).

According to Aquinas, all physical things are made for humanity. Since human beings become incorruptible at the general resurrection, they no longer have need of anything corruptible. The motion of the heavens, which causes generation and corruption, will also cease. Therefore, plants and animals will no longer be generated or corrupted, since the cause of these processes will cease.

In fact, Aquinas believes that those plants and animals which are alive at the time of the final judgement will be destroyed by fire.¹²

But the other animals, the plants, and the mixed bodies, those entirely corruptible both wholly and in part, will not remain at all in that state of incorruption. In this way, then, must the saying of the Apostle be understood: ‘The fashion of this world passes away’ (*1 Cor.* 7,31), that this appearance of the world which now is will cease to be, but the substance will remain. Thus, also, is understood what *Job* (24,12) says: ‘Man, when he is fallen asleep, shall not rise again: till the heavens be broken’ that is, until that disposition of the heaven ceases to be, that in which it is moved and causes motion in others. But since among the other elements fire is the most active, and tends to consume the corruptible, the consumption of the things which ought not remain in the future state will most suitably take place by fire. Hence, one holds in accord with the faith that at the last the world will be purified by fire, not from corruptible bodies alone, but from that infection which the place incurred by serving as the dwelling of sinners.

Aquinas holds in accordance with the faith that the world will be purified of corruption by fire and so corruptible things such as plants, animals, and minerals will be destroyed. However, the elements will remain part of the renewed world.

¹² ScG IV, c. 97 n. 5-6. Trans. Charles J. O’ Neil. (New York: Hanover House, 1957).

Aquinas also believes that God designed animals to be less perfect than human beings.¹³

(...) in natural things species seem to be arranged in degrees; as the mixed things are more perfect than the elements, and plants than minerals, and animals than plants, and men than other animals; and in each of these one species is more perfect than others. Therefore, as the divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction of things for the sake of the perfection of the universe, so it is the cause of inequality. For the universe would not be perfect if only one grade of goodness were found in things.

Notice that in this passage, animals are included as part of the universe, yet Aquinas excludes them from the glorified universe. With respect to degrees of perfection, animals are more perfect than elements, and yet Aquinas includes elements in the glorified universe. Nevertheless, Aquinas affirms that the divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction of things, and he also claims that death is in some sense natural.¹⁴

A thing is said to be natural if it proceeds from the principles of nature. Now the essential principles of nature are form and matter. The form of man is his rational soul, which is, of itself, immortal: wherefore death is not natural to man on the part of his form. The matter of man is a body such as is composed of contraries, of which corruptibility is a necessary consequence, and in this respect death is natural to man. Now this condition attached to the nature of the human body results from a natural necessity, since it was necessary for the human body to be the organ of touch, and consequently a mean between objects of touch: and this was impossible, were it not composed of contraries, as the Philosopher states (*De Anima* ii, 11). On the other hand, this condition is not attached to the adaptability of matter to form because, if it were possible, since the form is incorruptible, its matter should rather be incorruptible (...). Now God Who is the author of man is all-powerful, wherefore when He first made man, He conferred on him the favor of being exempt from the necessity resulting from such a matter: which favor, however, was withdrawn through the sin of our first parents. Accordingly, death is both natural on account of a condition attaching to matter, and penal on account of the loss of the Divine favor preserving man from death [Cf. I-II:85:6].

According to Aquinas, death is natural on account of the corruptibility of matter. In the case of human beings, God bestowed a special favor of exemption from death prior to the Fall. This exemption was removed after the Fall. In the case of animals, death

¹³ *STh* I, q. 47, a. 2 co.

¹⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 164, a. 1 ad 1.

is not a consequence of sin but rather a natural result of the corruptibility of matter and the corruptibility of the animal soul, which is mortal. However, Aquinas views corruptibility as evil.¹⁵

Now it is in this that evil consists, namely, in the fact that a thing fails in goodness. Hence it is clear that evil is found in things, as corruption also is found; for corruption is itself an evil.

But Aquinas thinks that the universe as a whole is good, even if parts of it are corruptible.¹⁶

God and nature and any other agent make what is best in the whole, but not what is best in every single part, except in order to the whole, as was said above (I:47:2). And the whole itself, which is the universe of creatures, is all the better and more perfect if some things in it can fail in goodness, and do sometimes fail, God not preventing this. This happens, firstly, because 'it belongs to Providence not to destroy, but to save nature,' as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* iv); but it belongs to nature that what may fail should sometimes fail; secondly, because, as Augustine says (*Enchir.* 11), 'God is so powerful that He can even make good out of evil.' Hence many good things would be taken away if God permitted no evil to exist; for fire would not be generated if air was not corrupted, nor would the life of a lion be preserved unless the ass were killed.

In this passage Aquinas again includes animals as part of the universe and he argues that God in his Providence saves nature. Aquinas also argues, following St. Augustine, that God can make good out of evil. Despite these claims, Aquinas clearly states in multiple texts that animals are not included in the glorified universe. He believes that God created animals to be corruptible and that God intends them to be eradicated by fire as part of the renewal of the world. Corruptibility is the first and primary barrier to the inclusion of animals in the glorified universe, but it isn't the only barrier discussed by Aquinas, as I will explain in the next section.

2. Barrers to the Glorified Universe: Lack of Utility

In the following passage from the *Compendium Theologiae*, Aquinas focuses on how corporeal things serve humanity.¹⁷

¹⁵ *STh* I, q. 48, a. 2 co.

¹⁶ *STh* I, q. 48, a. 2 ad 3.

¹⁷ *Compendium theologiae* I 148. Trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1947). See also *In IV Sent.* d. 48 q. 2 a. 1 co.

All things are directed to the divine goodness as to their end, as we have shown. Among things ordained to this end, some are closer to the end than others, and so participate in the divine goodness most abundantly. Therefore, lesser creatures, which have a smaller share in the divine goodness, are in some way subordinated to higher beings as to their ends. In any hierarchy of ends, beings that are closer to the ultimate end are also ends with respect to beings that are more remote . . . As in the order of efficient causes, the power of the first agent reaches the ultimate effects through intermediate causes, so in the order of ends, whatever is farther removed from the end attains to the ultimate end through the intermediacy of beings that are closer to the end (...) in the order of the universe, lower beings realize their last end chiefly (*praecipue*) by their subordination to higher beings. The same conclusion is manifest if we turn our attention to the order of things in itself. Things that come into being by a natural process, act as they are equipped by nature to act. As we observe, however, imperfect beings serve the needs of more noble beings; plants draw their nutriment from the earth, animals feed on plants, and these in turn serve man's use. We conclude, then, that lifeless beings exist for living beings, plants for animals, and the latter for men. And since, as we have seen, intellectual nature is superior to material nature, the whole of material nature is subordinate to intellectual nature. But among intellectual natures, that which has the closest ties with the body is the rational soul, which is the form of man. In a certain sense, therefore, we may say that the whole of corporeal nature exists for man, inasmuch as he is a rational animal. And so the consummation of the whole of corporeal nature depends, to some extent, on man's consummation.

In this text, Aquinas argues that the whole of corporeal nature exists for humanity. But the services creatures provide will no longer be needed in the glorified universe. Animals and plants will no longer serve humanity as food, contributing to physical human life. Since their services are no longer required, their continued existence is no longer required, either. Thus, lack of service or utility is the second barrier to inclusion in the glorified universe.

Despite the fact that animals, like other creatures, are directed to God as to a final cause, since they are lower beings, they realize their last end *praecipue* by being subordinated to human beings. Aquinas doesn't claim that animals exclusively achieve their final cause through subordination to human beings, but they chiefly achieve it through such subordination. I will return to this point in the next section. While I grant to Aquinas that God created animals with mortal souls and that some animals provide service to human beings in this life, in the next section I will argue that it would be fitting for God to include animals in the renewal of the world. In so doing, I will highlight specific aspects of Aquinas's thought that give support to my argument.

3. A Fittingness Argument for the Inclusion of Animals

Aquinas explores the concept of fittingness in several passages of his writings, including in his examination of the nature of sacred doctrine.¹⁸ He argues that the essence of goodness fits with God's nature.¹⁹

To each thing, that is befitting (*conveniens*) which belongs to it by reason of its very nature; thus, to reason befits man, since this belongs to him because he is of a rational nature. But the very nature of God is goodness, as is clear from Dionysius (*Div. Nom.* i). Hence, what belongs to the essence of goodness befits God. But it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others (*se aliis communicet*), as is plain from Dionysius (*Div. Nom.* iv).

According to Aquinas, that which is fitting is that which belongs to something by reason of its nature. For example, reason befits human beings. The essence of goodness befits God.

As part of his examination of God's nature, Aquinas cites Pseudo-Dionysius in claiming that it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others. It might not be clear to the reader what either thinker have in mind with respect to this claim. In a passage discussing the divine will, Aquinas writes the following.²⁰

God wills not only Himself, but other things apart from Himself . (...) For natural things have a natural inclination not only towards their own proper good, to acquire it if not possessed, and, if possessed, to rest therein; but also to spread abroad their own good amongst others, so far as possible. Hence we see that every agent, in so far as it is perfect and in act, produces its like. It pertains, therefore, to the nature of the will to communicate as far as possible to others the good possessed; and especially does this pertain to the divine will, from which all perfection is derived in some kind of likeness. Hence, if natural things, in so far as they are perfect, communicate their good to others, much more does it appertain to the divine will to communicate by likeness its own good to others as much as possible. Thus, then, He wills both Himself to be, and other things to be; but Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end; inasmuch as it befits the divine goodness that other things should be partakers therein.

¹⁸ *STh* I, q. 1, a. 9 co.

¹⁹ *STh* III, q. 1, a. 1 co. For a discussion of fittingness in Aquinas's Christology and its Aristotelian roots, see C.L. Barnes, "Aristotle in the *Summa Theologiae's* Christology", in: G. Emery, M. Levering (eds.), *Aristotle in Aquinas's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 186-231.

²⁰ *STh* I, q. 19, a. 2.

According to Aquinas, it pertains to the divine will to communicate its own good to others and this is achieved in that God wills Himself and other things to be, and that He wills that He is the final cause. Furthermore, it befits the divine goodness that other things should partake of it, in the sense that other things are ordained to God as the final cause. While Aquinas identifies the Incarnation as the highest manner in which God communicates Himself to creatures, this is not the only way God communicates His goodness.²¹

Using Aquinas's account of fittingness with respect to God's goodness, I offer the following argument:

1. That which is fitting belongs to something by reason of its nature.
2. The very nature of God is goodness.
3. Therefore, that which belongs to the essence of goodness belongs to God.
4. It belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others.
5. Therefore, to communicate His goodness to others befits God.
6. God communicates His goodness to others in that He wills others to be and to be ordained to Him as the final cause.
7. Therefore, it befits God that other things exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause.

Someone might object that premises (4) - (6) only apply to human beings. But Aquinas states that God's communication of His goodness extends to all things by writing, ". . . He communicates His goodness not merely to certain things, but to all."²² And again, Aquinas writes.²³

Although nothing apart from God is His end, yet He Himself is the end with respect to all things made by Him. And this by His essence, for by His essence He is good, as shown above (I:6:3): for the end has the aspect of good.

Given this clarification, premises (4) - (6) include animals. I will make this explicit by adding a premise to the original argument:

8. Therefore, it befits God that animals exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause.

The fittingness expressed in premises (7) and (8) is the "fit" between God's nature and the communication of His goodness. As expressed in the above argument, as well as in his writings, Aquinas believes that it befits the divine goodness that other things partake in it.

²¹ *STh* I, q. 19, a. 2.

²² *STh* I, q. 19, a. 4 ad 1.

²³ *STh* I, q. 19, a. 1 ad 1.

Despite this, Aquinas argues that animals are excluded from the glorified universe. Thus, he could interpret (8) as only applying in this life. Aquinas could hold this position on the grounds that animals chiefly achieve their final cause in this life and that as corruptible beings they could not exist in the glorified universe. I will return to this objection in a subsequent section.

But (8) is a premise about the fit between the communication of God's goodness to animals and His nature. Aquinas affirms that God's nature does not change.²⁴

From what precedes, it is shown that God is altogether immutable. First, because it was shown above that there is some first being, whom we call God; and that this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable.

Aquinas argues that God's pure actuality rules out any unactualized potential in Him. Therefore, God would not have any potential to change His nature and so it would be impossible for God's nature to change. Since this is so, what befits God's nature now would befit God's nature in the future.

Returning to the argument, I will make explicit God's unchangeable nature by adding a premise and thus,

9. God's nature doesn't change.

It is clear from other passages in Aquinas's writings that he believes that God can elect to do various things.²⁵

(...) since the goodness of God is perfect, and can exist without other things inasmuch as no perfection can accrue to Him from them, it follows that His willing things apart from Himself is not absolutely necessary.

So while God is not necessitated to will the existence of animals, when He elects to do something that act of will is brought to fruition. Nevertheless, He could elect to will that the existence of animals be temporary, and that appears to be Aquinas's view.

Since God's nature doesn't change, what fits with God's nature in this life would fit with God's nature in the future, and so my conclusion refers to the existence of animals in the future, after the general resurrection of human beings.

²⁴ *STh* I, q. 9, a. 1.

²⁵ *STh* I, q. 19, a. 3.

10. Therefore, it befits God that animals exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause in the glorified universe.

Aquinas holds that God's will is not necessitated and therefore, something could be fitting and He could elect not to will it. So (10) could be true, and animals be excluded from the glorified universe simply because God elects that they be excluded. I will take up this objection in the subsequent section in which I present possible reasons why God might elect to include animals in the glorified universe.

Returning to (10), Aquinas could object to this conclusion on the grounds that the nature of animals does not fit with the glorified universe, because corruptible animals do not fit with an incorruptible universe. As he writes.²⁶

No object wanting in an intrinsic principle of incorruptibility ought (*debet*) to remain in the state that is characterized by incorruption (...). In the final state of incorruption, therefore, men and the elements and the heavenly bodies will fittingly (*convenienter*) remain, but not other animals or plants or mixed bodies.

Aquinas could argue also that (10) is false precisely because the nature of animals does not fit with the incorruptibility of the glorified universe. There is a tension, therefore, in (10) between two different relations of "fittingness": the relation between the existence of animals in the glorified universe and God's nature, and the relation between the existence of animals and the glorified universe, itself. For my purposes in this paper, I will grant this objection and reformulate (10) as (10a). Thus,

- 10a. Therefore, it befits God that incorruptible animals exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause in the glorified universe.

Aquinas already concedes the truth of (10a) insofar as he affirms that glorified rational animals (human beings) will exist and be ordained to God as the final cause in the glorified universe. Aquinas excludes the other members of the genus *animal*, i.e., non-rational animals, because they are corruptible in both body and soul.

But if the corruptibility of non-rational animals could be removed by God, then one of Aquinas's objections to the inclusion of animals in the glorified universe would collapse. I will explore this possibility in the next subsection.

4. The Removal of Corruptibility

Aquinas argues that God removes the corruptibility of rational animals after the general resurrection through His divine power.²⁷

²⁶ *Comp. Theol.* I 170.

²⁷ *Comp. Theol.* I 155.

(T)he conquest of mortality will not induce any diversity either in species or in number. The idea of mortality contains nothing that could make it a specific difference of man, since it signifies no more than a passion. It is used to serve as a specific difference of man in the sense that the nature of man is designated by calling him mortal, to bring out the fact that he is composed of contrary elements, just as his proper form is designated by the predicate 'rational'; material things cannot be defined without including matter. However, mortality is not overcome by taking away man's proper matter. For the soul will not resume a celestial or ethereal body, as was mentioned above; it will resume a human body made up of contrary elements. Incorruptibility will come as an effect of divine power, whereby the soul will gain dominion over the body to the point that the body cannot corrupt. For a thing continues in being as long as form has dominion over matter.

In this passage, Aquinas makes clear his view that mortality is a passion connected with the contrary elements that compose a material body. However, the mortality of human beings is not overcome except by divine power, such that the soul acquires unending dominion over the material body. The divine power acts as a cause, and the effect on the soul is the continuation of being. The material body is still composed of contrary elements, but is no longer corruptible, owing to the dominion of the soul.

From this account, I intend to draw an analogy to non-human animals. Aquinas argues that animals cannot be delivered from corruption because an animal has a corruptible body and a corruptible soul. But human beings and other animals share the same kind of body; the relevant difference between human beings and other animals is that human beings have an immortal, rational soul while animals have a mortal, sensitive soul. Aquinas's explanation of how the corruptibility of the human body is overcome after the general resurrection is instructive for other animals in that his account appeals to God as the cause of the ongoing dominion of the soul over the body. By analogy, God could cause the ongoing dominion of an animal's soul over its body, thus rendering the animal body incorruptible.

Aquinas could object that it's impossible even for God to cause an animal soul to have dominion over an animal body indefinitely, since animal souls are mortal. But such an objection would be undermined by Aquinas's account of the human case. Even an immortal soul is insufficient to overcome the corruptibility of a body, as Aquinas makes clear in the above passage, as well as in his discussion of the special grace God gave Adam and Eve in their prelapsarian state in order to overcome the corruptibility of their bodies.²⁸ The corruptibility of a body can only be overcome by God in the case of human beings, and this despite the fact that human souls are immortal. Therefore, the mortality of an animal soul is not a greater barrier to the

²⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 164, a. 1 ad 1.

elimination of the corruptibility of a body than is the human soul. Both kinds of souls lack the ability to overcome the corruptibility of the body. Thus, it seems reasonable to suppose that divine power could overcome the corruptibility of animal bodies just as it does with human bodies.

Aquinas believes that an animal soul and its body co-exist, such that when the body is killed, the animal (including its soul), ceases to exist.²⁹ The mortality of animals is thus dependent on the corruptibility of their bodies. But if the connection between soul and body can be preserved by an act of God, then the body would be rendered incorruptible and death for the animal would no longer be possible. And this would be consistent with Aquinas's description of the renewal of the world, "The arrangement of renewal will neither be natural nor contrary to nature but will be above nature, just as grace and glory are above the soul's nature. And it will be from a perpetual agent, who will also preserve it perpetually".³⁰

Aquinas characterizes the renewed world as above nature. While he views the incorruptibility of animals as contrary to their nature, if the glorified universe exists above nature through grace, then the issue of contrariety to nature is obviated. God's grace, through His divine power, is sufficient to preserve and sustain the existence of human beings and other animals. Moreover, this state of affairs would be consistent with Aquinas's claim that all creatures subsist in God.³¹

Yes, in him all created things took their being, heavenly and earthly, visible and invisible; what are thrones and dominions, what are principedoms and powers? They were all created through him and in him; he takes precedence of all, and in him all subsist.

To be clear, I am not claiming that such an act of divine power would transform a non-rational animal into a rational animal. Incorruptibility and rationality are different properties and the acquisition of incorruptibility doesn't entail the acquisition of rationality. Moreover, I am not arguing for animal resurrection.³² I grant to Aquinas that the immortality of the human soul is sufficient to allow the soul to survive the death of the body and to subsist until the day of general resurrection.³³ A mortal animal soul would not survive the death of its body.

Perhaps it's the case that any animals included in the glorified universe are simply those animals that are alive at the day of general resurrection, and God, through his divine power, renders them incorruptible. In that case, Aquinas would be mistaken in inferring that God destroys those animals by fire.³⁴ While I am not

²⁹ *ScG* II, c. 82 n. 2.

³⁰ *Sent.* IV. d. 48 q. 2 a. 1 ad 4.

³¹ Col. 1, 16-17.

³² Aquinas includes an argument for the impossibility of animal resurrection as a *sed contra* in *In IV Sent.* d. 48 q. 2 a. 5 s.c. The analysis of this argument and others would require its own paper.

³³ *Comp Theol.* I cc. 151, 152.

³⁴ *ScG* IV, c. 97 n. 5-6.

specifying *which* animals God might elect to include, I am arguing that it would be fitting for God to include *some* incorruptible animals in the glorified universe, and so I will reformulate (10a) as (10b).

10b. Therefore, it befits God that some incorruptible animals exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause in the glorified universe.

I acknowledge that God may elect not to extend incorruptibility to animals that have already died. Further, He may elect not to include animals at all in the glorified universe. However, I have argued that it would be fitting for Him to do so.

Having argued that such inclusion could be possible if God were to eliminate the corruptibility of the animal, I will now turn my attention to Aquinas's objection that the lack of utility would be a further barrier. Addressing this objection will also illuminate the possibility of animals being included in the glorified universe so that they might be ordered to their final cause.

5. Final Causality, God's Love, and Animal Goodness

As outlined in the first section of this paper, Aquinas objects to the inclusion of animals in the glorified universe on the grounds that animals will no longer be useful to human beings. While he holds that animals, like other creatures, are directed to God as to a final cause, animals realize their last end chiefly by being subordinated to human beings.³⁵ Since animals achieve their purpose in this life, there remains nothing further for them to accomplish or to be ordered toward in the next life. However, this conclusion stands in tension with what Aquinas writes elsewhere about God's love for animals and the goodness He wills toward them, both of which befit God's nature.³⁶

Theologian John Berkman has written widely on the role of animals in Catholic moral theology and has explored Aquinas's contributions to that field.³⁷ In a recent article, Berkman points out that Aquinas affirms that God loves animals.³⁸ Aquinas writes.³⁹

³⁵ *Comp. Theol.* I 148.

³⁶ It's worth noting that some animals seem to serve no use to human beings in the Aquinian sense in that some animals have little to no contact with human beings or are never used as food or to support human life.

³⁷ See, for example, J. Berkman, 'From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology: Where Catholic Moral Theology Needs to Go', in: *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2014): 11-34, and Berkman, 'Towards a Thomistic Theology of Animality', in: C. Deane-Drummond, D. Clough (eds.), *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 21- 40. I would like to thank Professor Berkman for sharing his publications with me and for his conversations with me on these issues.

³⁸ J. Berkman, 'Must We Love Non-Human Animals? A Post-Laudato Si Thomistic Perspective', in: *New Blackfriars* 102, Issue 1099 (2020), 1-17.

³⁹ *STh* I, q. 20, a. 2 co.

God loves all existing things. For all existing things, in so far as they exist, are good, since the existence of a thing is itself a good; and likewise, whatever perfection it possesses. Now it has been shown above (I:19:4) that God's will is the cause of all things. It must needs be, therefore, that a thing has existence, or any kind of good, only inasmuch as it is willed by God. To every existing thing, then, God wills some good. Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists.

Aquinas affirms God's love for animals, that God wills goodness to animals, and the goodness of each animal insofar as it exists. Thus, a possible reason for God to include animals in the glorified universe is because He loves them, He wills goodness to them, and He desires the continued goodness of their existence. The continued existence of animals enables them to continue to be ordered to God as the final cause, and this benefits God, as expressed in (10b).

Aquinas clarifies his view in a response to an objection by writing.⁴⁰

(...) irrational creatures cannot attain to loving God, nor to any share in the intellectual and beatific life that He lives. Strictly speaking, therefore, God does not love irrational creatures with the love of friendship; but as it were with the love of desire, in so far as He orders them to rational creatures, and even to Himself. Yet this is not because He stands in need of them; but only on account of His goodness, and of the services they render to us.

While it's clear that Aquinas believes animals are primarily ordered to be useful to human beings, he acknowledges another purpose, making explicit that God orders animals to Himself. Aquinas points out that this ordering is not done because God needs animals in any way. But such an ordering benefits God's goodness.

Further, Aquinas argues that God loves animals out of charity.⁴¹

Nevertheless we can love irrational creatures out of charity, if we regard them as the good things that we desire for others, in so far, to wit, as we wish for their preservation, to God's honor and man's use; thus too does God love them out of charity.

While Aquinas rejects the notion that animals can be loved out of charity the way a human being loves a friend, he argues that animals can be loved as goods that are willed to another.⁴² Specifically, animals can be loved such that human beings and God, Himself, will them to be preserved "to God's honor and man's use".⁴³ In this

⁴⁰ *STh* I, q. 20, a. 2 ad 3.

⁴¹ *STh* II-II, q. 25, a. 3 co.

⁴² *STh* II-II, q. 25, a. 3 co.

⁴³ *STh* II-II, q. 25, a. 3 co.

conjunction, Aquinas recognizes a purpose for animals that is in addition to their usefulness, i.e., that they be preserved for the honour of God.

Moreover, Aquinas argues that each creature contributes to the perfection of the world.⁴⁴ He writes.⁴⁵

(...) because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.

According to Aquinas, animals contribute to the perfection of the universe insofar as they exist and, in so existing, participate in God's goodness and represent it. Therefore, the health and well-being of animals points to God's goodness and is a way of praising and honouring God.

Finally, Aquinas states explicitly that animals are directed to God as their final cause.⁴⁶

All things, by desiring their own perfection, desire God Himself, inasmuch as the perfections of all things are so many similitudes of the divine being; as appears from what is said above (I:4:3). And so of those things which desire God, some know Him as He is Himself, and this is proper to the rational creature; others know some participation of His goodness, and this belongs also to sensible knowledge; others have a natural desire without knowledge, as being directed to their ends by a higher intelligence.

According to Aquinas, all things desire their own perfection and thus desire God, Himself. Animals, having sensible knowledge, know some participation of God's goodness. Aquinas argues that animals concur with the last end of human beings, which is God, but not in the acquisition of this end. So non-human animals are ordered to God as a last end but they do not achieve it in the same way as human beings. Non-human animals acquire their last end in so far as they participate in the Divine likeness by existing, living, or knowing. While the existence of animals might intersect with human beings and while some animals may serve humanity, the relation of participation from animals to God is direct and over and above such service.

⁴⁴ Berkman discusses this as well in Berkman (2020), 11.

⁴⁵ *STh* I, q. 47, a. 1 co.

⁴⁶ *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1 ad 2. See also Leget, (1997), 70-72.

Thus, in Aquinas's writings we find several possible reasons why God might elect to include animals in the glorified universe. It is fitting for God to ordain animals to Him as the final cause, and He also loves animals and wills the good for them. Further, He wills that they be preserved for His honour. On the part of animals, they desire their own perfection and thus desire God, Himself, participating in the divine likeness by existing, living, or knowing. So God might include animals in the glorified universe as an expression of His goodness and so that they might continue to be ordered to Him as a final cause and continue to participate in His goodness, without the mediation of, or subordination to, human beings.

I am not claiming to have identified the *actual* reasons why God would or will include animals in the glorified universe. I am only arguing that I have identified *possible* reasons for the inclusion of some animals, and that these reasons can be inferred from Aquinas's own writings. Further, these reasons are consistent with (10b).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I will restate my argument and then I will raise three further theological considerations that are relevant to this discussion and that accord with (10b). My argument is the following.

1. That which is fitting belongs to something by reason of its nature.
2. The very nature of God is goodness.
3. Therefore, that which belongs to the essence of goodness belongs to God.
4. It belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others.
5. Therefore, to communicate His goodness to others befits God.
6. God communicates His goodness to others in that He wills others to be and to be ordained to Him as the final cause.
7. Therefore, it befits God that other things exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause.
8. Therefore, it befits God that animals exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause.
9. God's nature doesn't change.
- 10b. Therefore, it befits God that some incorruptible animals exist and are ordained to Him as the final cause in the glorified universe.

I will now turn my attention to three theological considerations that accord with (10b). First, Aquinas's assertion that the glorified universe is for human beings can be taken so far as to be theologically mistaken. While I grant the importance of redemption for human beings and thus, the importance of human beings in the renewed world, the Christian tradition does not teach that the glorified universe is centred around the worship of human beings. Rather, the Christian tradition holds

that the glorified universe is centred around the throne of God and His worship, as the Scriptures describe in *Revelation*, “God’s throne (which is the Lamb’s throne) will be there, with his servants to worship him”.⁴⁷ While I am not claiming that Aquinas believes the glorified universe is anthropocentric in the sense just described, I am concerned that his view could contribute to an anthropocentrism that would overlook the goodness of other creatures.

While Aquinas rejects the possibility of animals participating in the worship of God, the Psalmist calls on them to do so, writing, “All creatures that breath have, praise the Lord”.⁴⁸ Insofar as God ordains animals to Him as their final cause, and insofar as they achieve this final cause through existing and even praising God in their own ways, it would be fitting for God to include them in the glorified universe. In so doing, animals would be able to join with human beings in worshipping God, constituting a more fulsome renewal of the world.

Second, Aquinas thinks that even human beings who suffer God’s judgment after death are not subsequently destroyed and so they, too, are part of the renewal of the world. Those who die in mortal sin are resurrected and their bodies made incorruptible, but they do not participate in the beatific vision.⁴⁹ Aquinas associates this outcome with the last judgment, in which individual human beings are judged according to the state of their souls.⁵⁰ In contrast, Aquinas asserts that animals, insofar as they lack freedom of the will, don’t merit a reward for serving humanity, and even if they did merit an award, they are ordered to corruptibility.⁵¹

While I grant that animals do not merit the reward of the beatific vision, I have argued that it would be fitting for God to render some animals incorruptible, just as He renders incorruptible those human beings who merit punishment. If God renews insensible things like elements and heavenly bodies, as Aquinas maintains, then how much more fitting would it be for God to renew animals that He loves and cares for, and who manifest His goodness and participate in His likeness insofar as they exist, live, or know.⁵²

Third, Aquinas admits that when considering hypothetical states of affairs that could spring from God’s will, Christians must rely on Scripture.⁵³

For such things as spring from God's will, and beyond the creature's due (*debitum*), can be made known to us only through being revealed in the Sacred Scripture, in which the Divine Will is made known to us. Hence, since everywhere in the Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason of Incarnation, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of

⁴⁷ Rev. 22, 3.

⁴⁸ Ps. 150, 6.

⁴⁹ *ScG* IV, c. 89 n. 7.

⁵⁰ *ScG*. IV, cc. 89, 91.

⁵¹ *In IV Sent.* d. 48 a. 5 ad 2.

⁵² *STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 8 co. See also *In IV Sent.* d. 48 q. 2 a. 5 co.

⁵³ *STh* III, q. 1, a. 3 co.

Incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy for sin; so that, had sin not existed, Incarnation would not have been. And yet the power of God is not limited to this; even had sin not existed, God could have become incarnate.

Aquinas turns to Scripture in order to discern what could spring from God's will. In particular, he cites verses that he argues support his conclusion that animals are not part of the renewal of the world. But there are other passages that seem to support a renewal of the world that includes animals. Consider the following passage from *Isaiah*.⁵⁴

See where I create new heavens and a new earth; old things shall be remembered no longer, have no place in men's thoughts Wolf and lamb shall feed together, lion and ox eat straw side by side, and the serpent be content with dust for its food; all over this mountain, my sanctuary, there shall be no hurt done, the Lord says, no life shall be forfeit.

This Scriptural passage seems to describe animals in the renewed world, where death and predation are no more, and where animals no longer have an order to corruptibility. If the Aquinian strategy is to look to Scripture in order to discern that which might spring from the will of God, then this passage, as well as others, should be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, while I acknowledge that God does not owe a debt to animals, and therefore, does not owe it to animals to renew them, I have argued that it would be fitting for Him to include some incorruptible animals in the glorified universe and to order them to Him as the final cause, in whatever manner He deems best.⁵⁵

This paper is part of selected proceedings of the Aquinas at 800 conference, held September 22-25, 2024 at the University of Notre Dame. This part of the journal has been curated by Dr. Harm Goris, on behalf of the Thomas Instituut Utrecht.

⁵⁴ Is 65, 17, 25. See also Is 11, 6-9. I would like to thank Harm Goris for drawing this second *Isaiah* passage to my attention and for his very helpful comments on a previous version of this paper.

⁵⁵ While I have elected not to include a discussion of the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, it is clear in that text that Pope Francis affirmed the goodness and value of animals in the eyes of God and the fact that animals can join human beings in praising God.