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PIETAS

A Journal of Tradition, Place, and Things Divine

The Declaration of Independence at 250

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Logos, Law, and Longing: Tarzan as Natural Man

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The Tarzan stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs depict a version of natural man that may be compared to the accounts of Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, particularly regarding the capacities for reason and speech. The question of man's natural condition gives rise to different understandings of the origin, purpose, desirability, and, ultimately, proper functioning of civil society. The Tarzan stories show elements of the state of nature accounts of all these thinkers but ultimately have more in common with Aristotelian and Thomistic ideas of a natural inclination toward society and a guiding natural law.

Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875–1950) published his first story, *Under the Moons of Mars*, in 1912. He would go on to write almost 80 books of action-filled adventure fiction stretching from the Earth's core to the jungles of Africa to distant planets "beyond the farthest star." His most influential literary character has been Tarzan. The story of Tarzan has carved a place in our cultural memory, though that memory is often vague and erroneous because of the overlays of television and film. But Burroughs's books have declined in popularity, and Tarzan does not hold the place in the imaginations of young readers that he once did. Tarzan as Burroughs wrote him is virtually unknown to the current generation.

Readers were given their first introduction to Tarzan in *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), where we learn of the tragic demise of Lord John Clayton and his wife, Lady Alice, on a remote African coast, leaving their infant boy alone and vulnerable. Adopted by Kala, the she-ape, after the death of her own child, the boy grows up in a far different world than the one he would have known, a world where he struggles to find his place. Many of his struggles revolve around his nature being unsuited to his environment. Physically, he is different from the members of his adoptive clan. He is hairless, and is thus named Tarzan by the apes, meaning "White-Skin."[1] He is comparatively small and weak, especially as a child. Indeed, it is only Kala's love that prevents the other apes from destroying or discarding him as a burden. But he very quickly far exceeds the strength and agility attainable by civilized man.

[1] Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (New York: Quiet Vision Publishing, 2003), 33.

Of even greater importance is the difference in his intellect. Tarzan uses his cleverness to overcome foes and to aid the apes in the continuous battle for survival. Eventually, in conjunction with his physical prowess, it will propel him to leadership over the tribe. But he finds little satisfaction in his position. He discovers the products of civilization, especially books, in a lonely cabin which houses the sad remains of his parents, though he knows them not. His mind begins to awaken to new possibilities.

Dissatisfied with life among the apes and recognizing his differences from them, he seeks out other humans. The nearby village of cannibals does not fulfill his longings, however. When Professor Archimedes Q. Porter, daughter Jane, and party arrive, marooned on the coast, he begins a journey that will lead him out of the jungle and into the society of men.

Twenty-three more novels follow Tarzan's path to civilization and back again, battling both mighty creatures and devious human enemies. Though Burroughs never claimed his work held high literary value—he wrote to entertain—there is much here to speculate upon if we allow ourselves.

NATURAL MAN

Tarzan may be viewed as a depiction of natural man, man untutored and unhindered by civilization, before social and political organization, living in perfect freedom. As such, he is a participant in a discussion that runs from Aristotle through Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. The question of nature is immensely important for the political; from it arise different understandings of the origin, purpose, desirability, and, ultimately, proper functioning of civil society.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that man is by nature a political animal, indicated, above all, by his capacity for reason and speech (*logos*). Therefore, anyone who is by nature outside the city (polis) is either inferior or superior to man, "either a beast or a god."[2]

Following Aristotle, Aquinas also emphasizes reason and speech as proof that humans are meant to work and live together. But, in *On Kingship*, he also points to other indicators: their relatively fragile physical construction lacking means of defense such as horns and claws and the weakness of their natural instinct. The compensation for this lack of natural provision

[2] Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Bk. I, Ch. 2 (Hereafter cited by Bekker numbers), 1253a8–30.

is the capacity to reason: "Instead of all these, man was endowed with reason, by the use of which he could procure all these things for himself by the work of his hands."[3] Reason can conquer the hazards and deficiencies of the natural condition, but only given time and cooperation: "But it is not possible for one man to arrive at a knowledge of all these things by his own individual reason. It is therefore necessary for man to live in a multitude so that each one may assist his fellows, and different men may be occupied in seeking, by their reason, to make different discoveries—one, for example, in medicine, one in this and another in that."

Aristotle and Aquinas agree that association between human beings is natural: that we are formed in such a way as to desire such association and to find not only practical advantages but the fullness of our humanity within it. But these ideas would be challenged.

Early modern political thinkers offer a rival telling of the formation of human community which came to prominence in the seventeenth century: social contract theory. In this theory man is not naturally drawn to community, quite the opposite. In the writings of Thomas Hobbes, the state in which men live before the formation of civil society (the state of nature) is a terrible place. It is a state of war of every man against every man. Man is not by nature directed toward political community; rather, nature dissociates men and renders them "apt to invade and destroy one another."[4] Man can expect nothing from nature but unending conflict. The state of nature as described by John Locke is only slightly more tolerable, but the result for both writers is that man must seek some way to escape his natural condition. This escape is accomplished through the social contract. People eventually realize that anything is better than living the way they are, so they get together and agree to create civil society for their own preservation. This society is not natural as it was for Aristotle and Aquinas; it is an artifact of human making.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was also a social contract theorist, though he saw both advantages and disadvantages in the formation of civil society. "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains" begins his *Social Contract*, meaning that society's benefits were accompanied by the evils of social, political and economic inequality, exploitation, and deceit.[5] The original

[3] Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, ed. William Baumgarth and Richard Regan, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 2002), 204.
[4] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 76.
[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 46.

freedom which man had enjoyed before government emerged is lost. Putting aside his prescriptions for solving this problem, let us focus on his description of natural man:

> ...by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of nature, I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all: I see him sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.[6]

Rousseau characterizes natural man as an a-rational, isolated semi-ape incapable of real communication or more than momentary association with his species. Rousseau was the first thinker in the eighteenth century to posit that humans evolved from apes.[7] As simple and solitary as they were in Rousseau's formulation, they were happy and good because they were still free from the source of evil, dependence upon others.

How does Tarzan fit within these characterizations?

REASON AND SPEECH

Aristotle's description of those outside human community by nature or choice as being either beasts or gods finds an echo in Burroughs's stories. Tarzan is described as having the characteristics of both. He bears much resemblance to the beast in his early life—in freedom, strength, ferocity, and simple existence—and he often behaves as one, but he is not a beast. He is more. Thereupon hinges his entire tale. When Jane is contemplating his strange existence and attempting to discern his character, she describes him in transcendent terms: "What a perfect creature! There could be naught of cruelty or baseness beneath that godlike exterior. Never, she thought had such a man strode the earth since God created the first in his own image."[8] But he is not a god either. That leaves only the middle position—that of man. By what signs is this demonstrated?

The emphasis on reason and speech in Aristotle and Aquinas is reflected upon in numerous ways in the tales of Tarzan. Though Tarzan lives among the beasts, it is his rationality that makes him fundamentally different. Reason functions as the catalyst for many

[6] Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Victor Gourevitch, *The First and Second Discourses Together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages* (Estados Unidos: Harper Torchbooks, 1990), 141–142.
[7] Larry Arnhart, *Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls*, 3rd edition (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2003), 223.
[8] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 167.

of his adventures, the means by which he survives them, and a driving force of his development as a character.

Burroughs points to reason as the fundamental difference between Tarzan and the beasts around him: "But there was that which had raised him far above his fellows of the jungle—that little spark which spells the whole vast difference between man and brute—Reason."[9] Far from providing only theoretical benefits or distant practical advantage, reason saves Tarzan from immediate death on multiple occasions—its practical application is immediately apparent. When young Tarzan (described here as the man-child) and an ape companion are being stalked by Sabor, the lioness, Tarzan is able to comprehend the danger and react far more quickly than his companion: "His life amidst the dangers of the jungle had taught him to meet emergencies with self-confidence, and his higher intelligence resulted in a quickness of mental action far beyond the powers of the apes."[10] Tarzan dives into the deep water before him, thus escaping death and discovering an ability to swim, which none of the great apes possess.

Though it is true that reason unaccompanied by Tarzan's physical prowess would not have saved him from the "the iron muscles and tearing fangs' of his bitter enemy, the great ape Terkoz; it did enable him to make the best use of his abilities and overcome his foe. "It was the half-Nelson of modern wrestling which the untaught ape-man had stumbled upon, but superior reason showed him in an instant the value of the thing he had discovered. It was the difference to him between life and death."[11]

Reason also provides Tarzan other advantages, and his cleverness is depicted in multiple ways. He alone learned to twist long grasses together into ropes, which he used to great effect in both play and combat. Reason showed him the use of the knife he found in coastal cabin, and reason enabled him (rather miraculously) to teach himself to read with the books he also discovered there. "In Tarzan's clever little mind many thoughts revolved, and back of these was his divine power of reason."[12]

Reason and curiosity go together. Tarzan is curious. He desires to know not only the "what" but the "why" of the world around him. *Jungle Tales of Tarzan* (1919), the sixth

[9] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 93–94.
[10] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 36.
[11] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 94.
[12] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 39.

Tarzan book in order of publication, which revisits the scenes of his early life, pursues this theme.

> His was an inquisitive mind. Always he had been full of questions concerning all that passed around him; but there never had been one to answer his questions. In childhood he had wanted to KNOW, and, denied almost all knowledge, he still, in manhood, was filled with the great, unsatisfied curiosity of a child. He was never quite content merely to perceive that things happened—he desired to know WHY they happened. He wanted to know what made things go.[13]

That the apes do not share his curiosity and are incapable of *logos*, the unity of reason and speech, begins to widen the gap between them and Tarzan.

Aristotle emphasizes speech in man's political nature by noting that "Man alone among the animals has speech."[14] While animals have voice and can indicate "the painful or the pleasant," humans can deliberate and communicate about good and bad and just and unjust and "partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city." In Burroughs's description, the great apes do have a kind of language, which Tarzan can speak, but its vocabulary is extremely limited, and it does not have the power to describe or contemplate much beyond the immediate concerns of food and survival.

> Imagine, if you can, a child filled with the wonders of nature, bursting with queries and surrounded only by beasts of the jungle to whom his questionings were as strange as Sanskrit would have been. If he asked Gunto what made it rain, the big old ape would but gaze at him in dumb astonishment for an instant and then return to his interesting and edifying search for fleas; and when he questioned Mumga, who was very old and should have been very wise, but wasn't, as to the reason for the closing of certain flowers after Kudu had deserted the sky, and the opening of others during the night, he was surprised to discover that Mumga had never noticed these interesting facts, though she could tell to an inch just where the fattest grubworm should be hiding.[15]

Tarzan cannot find true community in accordance with his nature with the apes. Thus, dissatisfactions of reason and speech are a wedge between Tarzan and the tribe that will ultimately take him out of his jungle existence.

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[13] Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan* (New York: Quiet Vision Publishing, 2003), 190.
[14] Aristotle, *Politics* 1253 a9–18.
[15] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 190–191.

In *Tarzan of the Apes*, the acquisition of the ability to speak with his fellow humans plays a large part in his actual departure for civilized lands. After many years of studying in the coastal cabin, Tarzan presents the unusual spectacle of an ability to read unconnected to verbal speech. When Jane and her party arrive in the company of the cutthroat sailors who are stranding them there, Tarzan writes a note proclaiming his ownership of the cabin and its contents but, though he saves both Clayton and Jane from certain death, he is unable to communicate with them except by primitive signs. It is only after a French cruiser arrives to rescue them and Tarzan rescues the courageous Lieutenant D'Arnot from cannibals that he will gain this ability. Tarzan watches over the wounded D'Arnot as he recovers, and the Lieutenant asks in writing how he might repay the kindness. "'Teach me to speak the language of men,'" is Tarzan's reply.[16]

D'Arnot begins to teach him in French, which he comes to regret because it does not reflect written English. Nonetheless, Tarzan progresses very quickly in verbal communication. When D'Arnot recovers sufficiently for them to return to the coast, they find Jane and the others have departed. Tarzan's grief is poignant: "A great bitterness rose in his heart. He would go away, far into the jungle and join his tribe. Never would he see one of his own kind again, nor could he bear the thought of returning to the cabin. He would leave that forever behind him with the great hopes he had nursed there of finding his own race and becoming a man among men."

He does depart but is recalled by social impulse and responsibility: "'If you are an ape you will do as the apes would do.... If you are a man, you will return to protect your kind,'" he chastises himself. "'You will not run away from one of your own people, because one of them has run away from you.'"[17] This newly firm idea of his "own people" is grounded largely in an increased horizon of understanding achieved through effective communication.

Driven much by his love for Jane, Tarzan insists D'Arnot help him travel to America, her homeland. They agree to march north toward civilization, and the Frenchman employs the time educating Tarzan and preparing him to live among his fellow human beings.

[16] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 196.
[17] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 197-99.

THE GUIDE OF NATURAL LAW

All of the thinkers we have mentioned are concerned in one way or another with what drives human behavior in regard to the formation of political community. From Aquinas onward, the conversation is carried on in terms of natural law or a law of nature. Aquinas roots natural law in the eternal law of God: "the plan of governance of the world existing in God as the ruler of the universe has the nature of law."[18] The special participation of rational creatures in the eternal law is the natural law, which gives them inclinations in accordance with their nature.

Aquinas's formulation of these natural inclinations provides a useful framework for examining the Tarzan stories in terms of his desire and ability to find and live in meaningful community. The dictates of the natural law in Aquinas can be summed up as inclinations to self-preservation, to the procreation and education of offspring, to live in society, and to know truths about God.[19]

SELF-PRESERVATION

Aquinas's first dictate of the natural law, an inclination to self-preservation, finds ample illustration in Burroughs's Tarzan novels. Preserving himself from the many mortal threats lurking beneath the jungle canopy provides the framework for Tarzan's experience.

Self-preservation forms a key aspect for the law of nature in the other thinkers as well. The bedrock of Hobbesian natural law is the right of nature, which he defines as "the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto."[20] Similarly, Locke sees self-preservation as foundational, though he adds the concept of duty to mankind in general and therefore restraint: "...when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of Mankind, and may not unless it be to do Justice on an Offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the Life, the Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another."[21]

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[18] Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 16.
[19] Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 43–44.
[20] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 79.
[21] John Locke, *The Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, ed. Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 271.

But a drive to preserve oneself does not necessitate capacity. An indicator that man is meant to live in community discussed by Aquinas in *On Kingship* a is lack of physical advantages sufficient for survival in isolation: "For all other animals, nature has prepared food, hair as a covering, teeth, horns, claws as means of defence or at least speed in flight, while man alone was made without any natural provisions for these things."[22] Tarzan's physical weakness is apparent to the great apes. Kala, his adoptive mother, is chided about his inadequacy by her husband: "'He will never be a great ape,' he argued. 'Always will you have to carry him and protect him. What good will he be to the tribe? None; only a burden.'"[23] Though slowly by the standards of the jungle, Tarzan does develop enough physically to survive. By human standards, he exceeds anything within the reach of civilized man: "Though but ten years old he was fully as strong as the average man of thirty, and far more agile than the most practiced athlete ever becomes. And day by day his strength was increasing."[24] With adulthood, he is described as a "forest god" by the civilized people who first encounter him. He can defeat great apes and lions, and it is with justification that he claims after his first combat kill, "There be none among you as mighty as Tarzan. Let his enemies beware."[25]

Tarzan's capacity for self-preservation is firmly established and Burroughs's characterizations of his massive strength cries out for comparison to another aspect of Rousseau's natural man: he is strong—much stronger and more capable than civilized man. Because he has no machines or devices to aid him, his body is far more powerful and his physical abilities far superior to his modern, cultured descendant.

> Since his body is the only tool which savage man knows, he puts it to various uses of which our bodies are incapable for want of practice; our industry deprives us of the strength and the agility which necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had an axe, could he break such solid branches by hand? If he had a sling, would he throw a stone as hard by hand? If he had a Horse, would he run as fast?[26]

[22] Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 204.
[23] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 33.
[24] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 34.
[25] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 57.
[26] Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 142.

If civilized man had time to gather all his machines about him, he would no doubt best natural man. But the contest would be even more unequal and the result very different if they were pitted against each other naked and unarmed.

Against what must man protect himself? Beasts are the primary threat for Tarzan, and he must overcome them with power of both body and mind. But other dangers to self-preservation are emphasized by political thinkers. The first is the environment. Aristotle notes that humans need resources for survival and that those needs are increasingly met through developing community. Aquinas writes of "the hazards and deficiencies of the natural condition," which are again, overcome through cooperation. The emphasized threat begins to shift with the early moderns toward man himself. While killing in war and self-defense are present in Aquinas, they take center stage in the Hobbesian description of the state of nature. According to Hobbes, the three principal causes of conflict in the state of nature are competition (arising from two or more men desiring the same thing which they cannot both enjoy); diffidence (distrust arising from the anticipation that others might attempt to deprive a man of what he has); and glory (reputation, that others should value a man at the same rate he sets upon himself). These seeds of conflict sprout out of the grime of Hobbesian human nature into the gruesome crop of perpetual war, the "war of every man against every man."[27]

While Locke's initial descriptions of the state of nature are less violent than those of Hobbes, as his account in the *Second Treatise of Government* proceeds the moderating effects of his law of nature fall away, leaving man in a state of violence and insecurity sufficient to drive him to create civil society through the social contract as the only means of preserving himself.

For Rousseau, man was happy in his natural state. While he had to guard against beasts, he was strong and self-reliant enough to do so. He did not need others of his kind. He did not want others. Increasingly complex social ties created all the quarrels of man versus man.

Despite these differences, for the early modern thinkers nature does not encourage complex human society; it will be difficult to create and to maintain. But for all of these thinkers, from Aristotle on, the private household is the precursor to, and in some sense the

[27] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 76.

pattern for, later political life. Tarzan also starts his journey by attempting to satisfy his natural longings at the domestic hearth.

PROCREATION AND EDUCATION OF OFFSPRING

Tarzan's desire for a mate is the subject of the story "Tarzan's First Love" in *Jungle Tales*. There is nothing sexual in Tarzan's feelings for Teeka, a young she-ape with whom he had grown up. He reflects on her beauty, but what he craves is affection, which no one in the harsh jungle has shown him since the death of Kala. "The ape-boy craved affection.... It was not until he was bereft of her that the boy realized how deep had been his attachment for his mother, for as such he looked upon her. In Teeka he had seen within the past few hours a substitute for Kala—someone to fight for and to hunt for—someone to caress...."[28]

But Teeka has another admirer, Taug the great ape. When Taug is captured by the natives, Tarzan at first rejoices that the prize will be his. But, as he puts his arm around Teeka, he is suddenly struck by their differences.

> As he did so he noticed, with a start, the strange incongruity of that smooth, brown arm against the black and hairy coat of his lady-love. He recalled the paw of Sheeta's mate across Sheeta's face—no incongruity there. He thought of little Manu hugging his she, and how the one seemed to belong to the other. Even the proud male bird, with his gay plumage, bore a close resemblance to his quieter spouse, while Numa, but for his shaggy mane, was almost a counterpart of Sabor, the lioness. The males and the females differed, it was true; but not with such differences as existed between Tarzan and Teeka.
>
> Tarzan was puzzled. There was something wrong. His arm dropped from the shoulder of Teeka. Very slowly he drew away from her.[29]

Realizing his mistake, Tarzan rescues Taug from certain death, telling him to go to Teeka. Tarzan now knows she is not a suitable mate for him.

> "For the Gomangani there is another Gomangani," he said; "for Numa, the lion, there is Sabor, the lioness; for Sheeta there is a she of his own kind; for Bara, the deer; for Manu, the monkey; for all the beasts and the birds of the jungle is there a mate. Only for Tarzan of the Apes is there none. Taug is an ape. Teeka is an ape. Go back to Teeka. Tarzan is a man. He will go alone."[30]

[28] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 10–11.
[29] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 14–15.
[30] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 17.

This story bears some resemblance to the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2. Viewing and naming all the animals God has created, Adam finds no helper fit for him. He needs someone who also bears *imago Dei*, and God fashions Eve because "'It is not good that man should be alone.'" Tarzan's longings reflect this need for a helper but, like Adam, he cannot find one suitable among the beasts. It is only when Jane Porter enters his life that he will find the union proper to his nature.

Though Tarzan's search for a mate is temporarily thwarted, he still has a longing for family. He is much attached to Teeka and Taug's offspring, Gazan. When they have accepted him as part of their family, Tarzan watches over the young one: "Their fears were allayed and Tarzan now found himself often in the role of nursemaid to a tiny anthropoid—an avocation which he found by no means irksome, since Gazan was a never-failing fount of surprises and entertainment." But, as fond as Gazan was of him, he was not his parent—Tarzan's longings are unfulfilled: "...he only knew that he craved something which was denied him; something which seemed to be represented by those relations which existed between Teeka and her balu, and so he envied Teeka and longed for a balu of his own."[31]

When Tarzan comes across a mother and child at the river near the native village, it occurs to him to take the boy for his own: "Here was a balu fashioned as he himself was fashioned. Of course this one's skin was black; but what of it? Tarzan had never seen a white man. In so far as he knew, he was the sole representative of that strange form of life upon the earth. The black boy should make an excellent balu for Tarzan, since he had none of his own."[32] But Tarzan does not desire to have a child merely as a possession, he wants to take on all the responsibilities of parenthood: "He would tend him carefully, feed him well, protect him as only Tarzan of the Apes could protect his own, and teach him out of his half human, half bestial lore the secrets of the jungle from its rotting surface vegetation to the high tossed pinnacles of the forest's upper terraces."

The project does not go well. The child is quite reasonably terrified by his new existence, longs for his mother, and begins to decline physically. Tarzan is forced to admit that Go-bu-balu, as he calls him, is not well fitted to the life of the jungle. In the end, Tarzan returns the boy to his mother. He is driven both by compassion and the realization that the pairing is

[31] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 66.
[32] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 69–70.

again not suitable: "'For Teeka there is Teeka's balu,' he soliloquized; 'for Sabor there are balus, and for the she-Gomangani, and for Bara, and for Manu, and even for Pamba, the rat; but for Tarzan there can be none—neither a she nor a balu. Tarzan of the Apes is a man, and it must be that man walks alone.'"[33]

But Tarzan is not happy with being alone. He strongly desires to find partnership and affection. This desire shapes the character's narrative arc more powerfully than any other characteristic. In accord with his nature, he desires to live in society rather than being driven into it by necessity.

TO LIVE IN SOCIETY

Burroughs's depiction of Tarzan is in accord the Aristotelian and Thomistic notion that man is meant to live in society. Another proof is found in Tarzan's desire to do so. His entire story could be said to be about his search for a community where he belongs. In the social contract theory of Hobbes, natural man does not desire community except as a means of safety. Locke is slightly more generous, but the desire is still not sufficiently powerful in itself to escape the state of nature. Tarzan is not concerned with safety. He would have no fear of the Hobbesian state of nature. Rousseau's natural man, at least initially, has no desire for community at all beyond what is necessary for procreation; he is barely aware of other members of his species. Burroughs's apes are more communal than Rousseau's human semi-apes.

The question of safety raises a point of contrast between, especially, Hobbes and Rousseau. The idea of the noble savage is most frequently connected to Rousseau, though he never used the phrase. Noble savage implies the innate goodness of humans not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization. Rousseau disagrees with Hobbes's characterization of natural man and his description of the state of nature. The aggressive behaviors Hobbes attributes to natural man that make the state of nature unbearable, Rousseau believes to be products of society. The self-centered indifference of Rousseau's natural man is not as aggressive as the socialized vanity that insists on proving superiority to others. As a result, the state of nature is essentially peaceful, contra Hobbes. What is more, Rousseau's natural man is moved by the natural sentiment of pity. Compassion carries him

[33] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 87.

to the assistance of those who suffer and restrains him from injuring others where his own existence is not threatened.[34]

Is Tarzan innately good? Does he conform more closely to the vision of Hobbes or Rousseau? He is certainly free of those elements of society that would make him dependent upon others. Tarzan is the epitome of the man who needs no other for survival, nor does he require any tools or comforts beyond what he can make with his own hands or find within the jungle. And Tarzan clearly does display compassion and fellow feeling even during his life among the beasts. He comes to the defense of his tribe many times, even exceeding Rousseau's natural man by putting his own survival at serious risk to do so. He demonstrates compassion for beasts even outside the tribe. His attempt to adopt a child taught him to sympathize with Sabor, the lioness as she grieved over her dead cub: "With the acquisition of Go-bu-balu, Tarzan had come to realize the responsibilities and sorrows of parentage, without its joys. His heart went out to Sabor as it might not have done a few weeks before."[35]

But if he met Sabor in different circumstances, he would not hesitate to kill. Tarzan is a killer. He has to be to survive. What is more, Tarzan kills for reasons beyond survival:

> To kill was the law of the wild world he knew. Few were his primitive pleasures, but the greatest of these was to hunt and kill, and so he accorded to others the right to cherish the same desires as he, even though he himself might be the object of their hunt. His strange life had left him neither morose nor bloodthirsty. That he joyed in killing, and that he killed with a joyous laugh upon his handsome lips betokened no innate cruelty. He killed for food most often, but, being a man, he sometimes killed for pleasure, a thing which no other animal does; for it has remained for man alone among all creatures to kill senselessly and wantonly for the mere pleasure of inflicting suffering and death.[36]

But what of killing his own kind? The above passage occurs in the context of Tarzan's first contact with man, Kulonga, the son of the chief of the local village. Tarzan kills him. He plunges his knife into Kulonga's heart. But it is not for pleasure that he does so. It is for revenge. For Kulonga had recently killed Kala, Tarzan's ape mother. Her death had evoked a tremendous display of anger and grief, but these emotions have subsided before he kills Kulonga: "And when he killed for revenge, or in self-defense, he did that also without

[34] Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses,* 162–163.
[35] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 81.
[36] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 74.

hysteria, for it was a very businesslike proceeding which admitted of no levity."[37] Tarzan stalks Kulonga mercilessly, but he is in control of himself. He waits, he follows, because he wants to learn as much as possible about man. Kulonga's humanity is a separate issue from the task of revenge.

Tarzan observes the native village with great curiosity, for here were beings like unto himself. Nonetheless his identification with them only goes so far: "Tarzan of the Apes was no sentimentalist. He knew nothing of the brotherhood of man. All things outside his own tribe were his deadly enemies...."[38] Yet this is not the whole tale. In the episode of the *balu*, Tarzan fights to save the boy and his mother from a hungry lion. When he sees her fearless love for her son, of which he now has a greater understanding, he cannot but return her child to her.

A crucial aspect of all the accounts of natural man is his attitude toward his fellow human beings and its results for the formation of society. A final meeting point between the thinkers discussed may be seen in the first moments Tarzan becomes aware of others like himself. The first is when Tarzan is trailing the killer of Kala: "In the soft mud on the bank of a tiny rivulet he found footprints such as he alone in all the jungle had ever made, but much larger than his. His heart beat fast. Could it be that he was trailing a MAN—one of his own race?"[39] His curiosity and excitement are evident, as is his desire to see and understand those like himself.

The second is when he first glimpses "a number of white men like himself" on the beach near the coastal cabin. He witnesses is one of the mutinous sailors shooting another in the back. His first impulse to rush forward crumbles: "It was well, thought he, that he had not given way to his first impulse to rush forward and greet these white men as brothers."[40]

Like Robinson Crusoe finding the footprint in the sand, Tarzan has a desire to be with those of his own kind. But in both instances, he is dismayed by the wickedness of humanity. He discovers that the natives are cannibals who torture their victims: "Tarzan of the Apes, young and savage beast of the jungle, wondered at the cruel brutality of his own kind. Sheeta, the leopard, alone of all the jungle folk, tortured his prey. The ethics of all the others meted

[37] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 74.
[38] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 74.
[39] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 69.
[40] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 102.

a quick and merciful death to their victims."[41] His impression of white men is no better: "They were evidently no different from the black men—no more civilized than the apes—no less cruel than Sabor."[42]

The Tarzan stories can be a source of rich reflection on natural man and the origins of society because they contain elements of the theories of all of our thinkers, from Aristotle to Rousseau. Tarzan struggles to survive and develop more complex, meaningful relationships, his social impulses challenged by inner drives as well as external threats. But Aquinas alone writes of a natural inclination to know God. That inclination, too, is found in the stories Edgar Rice Burroughs penned about the jungle hero.

TO KNOW TRUTHS ABOUT GOD

Tarzan of the Apes is perhaps not the first literary character one would associate with theological questions, but "The God of Tarzan," one of twelve stories comprising *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, deals explicitly with Tarzan's search for the divine.

Tarzan is curious. He desires to know not only the "what" but the "why" of the world around him. In his early wanderings he uncovers a vast treasure-store of knowledge, the coastal hut in which he was born, which still contains the books belonging to his father. His native intelligence, combined with determined labor and great patience, reveals to him the purpose of the letters on the pages, which he calls "bugs," that in various combinations form a silent language describing objects and concepts.

Of all the many unfamiliar concepts before the eyes of the young Tarzan, some exert a more powerful beckoning pull: "There were, of course, certain words which aroused his curiosity to a greater extent than others, words which, for one reason or another, excited his imagination. There was one, for example, the meaning of which was rather difficult to grasp. It was the word GOD." He is first attracted to the word because of the number of "he-bugs" (upper-case letters) that figure in its definition— "Supreme Deity, Creator or Upholder of the Universe"—indicating its importance.[43]

After many months of consideration, Tarzan comes to think of God as a mighty chieftain, the king of all the Mangani (great apes). But unlike other things described in the books, he

[41] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 81.
[42] Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 102.
[43] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 46.

finds no picture of God. He does find pictures of places dedicated to His worship, strengthening the idea of God's power and influence. The idea occurs to him that God might be of a different form altogether, and Tarzan resolves to set out in search of Him.

First, he goes to the wise and experienced. He questions Mumga, "who was very old and had seen many strange things in her long life."[44] But she is consumed by the trivial. The small dramas of everyday life make more impression upon her than "all the innumerable manifestations of the greatness of God which she had witnessed, and which, of course, she had not understood." Overhearing, an old he-ape called Numgo, advances a theory. He posits that lightning and rain and thunder come from Goro, the moon, and that Tarzan might begin his investigation there.

That night, Tarzan climbs the tallest tree in the jungle to investigate Goro, but he finds the moon allusive and far away. Nonetheless, Tarzan poses his questions: "'Tell me,' he continued, 'if you be the great king who sends Ara, the lightning; who makes the great noise and the mighty winds, and sends the waters down upon the jungle people when the days are dark and it is cold. Tell me, Goro, are you God?'"[45] Receiving no answer, Tarzan concludes that Goro is afraid and cannot be God.

This apparent cowing of the moon increases Tarzan's sense of self-importance and power. He returns to Numgo to boast of his victory. But this mood does not last long, it was but the manifestation of the rule of the jungle, which beats its chest, bares its fangs, and seeks to prove its strength. When Numgo bids him go away and let him sleep, Tarzan almost desperately presses his question: "'But where shall I find God?' insisted Tarzan. 'You are very old; if there is a God you must have seen Him. What does He look like? Where does He live?'"[46]

Exasperated by Tarzan's insistence, and never having had any true interest in the investigation, Numgo answers flippantly: "'I am God,' replied Numgo. 'Now sleep and disturb me no more.'" When Tarzan shakes and nearly strangles the ape, demanding to know if Numgo will indeed claim divinity, Numgo quickly realizes he must send this earnest

[44] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 47.
[45] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 48.
[46] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 49.

seeker on another path. He tells Tarzan to ask the humans where God is: "They are hairless like yourself and very wise, too. They should know."[47]

Though his relations with the natives in the nearby village have not been friendly, Tarzan decides to follow this advice. Watching from the branches of an overhanging tree, Tarzan witnesses a ceremony full of religious spectacle and awe, the initiation of young warriors into adulthood. Presiding over this ritual is the village witchdoctor, dressed in all the fantastic habiliments of his arcane art and endeavoring through every strange and grotesque motion to instill awe in his devotees.

The longer Tarzan watches the more he is convinced that he is looking upon God. Determined to have words with the Deity, he leaps down into the middle of the village, much to the terror of the spectators, and confronts the witchdoctor with a direct question: "'Are you God?'" The natives flee in terror, leaving the witchdoctor alone to confront this terrible apparition.

Though the witchdoctor does not understand Tarzan's speech, he understands clearly enough that his professional position, and likely his life, are at stake. He does his best to intimidate Tarzan with every dramatic effect of speech and action aimed at creating religious dread. Unmoved, Tarzan continues to advance until the witchdoctor, realizing his failure, flees. Mystified by this reaction, Tarzan tries to reassure the hastily retreating figure: "'Come back, God, I will not harm you.'"[48] A scuffle follows, in which the buffalo-hide vestments and fearsome visage of the witchdoctor are torn from him, revealing a terrified and merely mortal man. Tarzan is disgusted: "'So you are God!' he cried. 'If you be God, then Tarzan is greater than God.'" His belligerence has returned: "'Tarzan is greater than God. See!' and with a sudden wrench he twisted the black's neck until the fellow shrieked in pain and then slumped to the earth in a swoon."[49] After voicing the terrible victory cry of the bull ape, Tarzan departs.

Despite his claim of victory over God, it is clear from his subsequent continuing search for the Deity that, like his overawing of the moon, the episode of the witchdoctor has not convinced him that he has truly met the divine. Yet, as the remainder of the tale reveals, the search has affected him, has begun to change him.

[47] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 49.
[48] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 53.
[49] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 53–54.

His search for the truth of God has also excited opposition and danger. The village chief, Mbonga, having witnessed the defeat of the witchdoctor, is determined to destroy the "forest demon" and stalks him with raised spear. A large part of his motivation is to save the reputation of the theological arm of his governance: "...as a chief he was well convinced of the power of the witch-doctor as an arm of government, and often it was that Mbonga used the superstitious fears of his people to his own ends through the medium of the medicine-man."[50] Mbonga underestimates the bestial prowess of his prey and is overcome.

But as he stands over his prostate foe with drawn knife, "Tarzan the Killer," as he has described himself, hesitates to kill. "Something stayed the ape-man's hand for an instant. He wondered why it was that he hesitated to make the kill; never before had he thus delayed." Tarzan really sees the chief for the first time. He sees the terror in his eyes and the appeal for mercy upon his face. He feels something new: "It was pity—pity for a poor, frightened, old man."[51] He grants mercy; he does not kill.

As he travels back to the jungle home of his tribe, Tarzan meditates upon these events. What power had stayed his hand to prevent him from slaying his enemy? It was as if a power greater than himself had commanded him to spare the man's life. This puzzles him, "for he could conceive of nothing, or no one, with the authority to dictate to him what he should do, or what he should refrain from doing."[52]

But the next morning even more internal changes are apparent in Tarzan. He begins to see the world around him in a new way. As he awakens in his leafy bower, he is struck by the beauty of an orchid opening to the sun. This process, which he had witnessed a thousand times before, had never sparked the questions that now occur to him. "Where and how, anyway, did they all come from—the trees, the flowers, the insects, the countless creatures of the jungle?" From the contemplation of the wonders of nature springs the idea of the Creator: "Quite unexpectedly an idea popped into Tarzan's head. In following out the many ramifications of the dictionary definition of GOD he had come upon the word CREATE—'to cause to come into existence; to form out of nothing.'"[53]

[50] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 55.
[51] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 57.
[52] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 57.
[53] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 58.

These reflections are interrupted by a scream of terror. Rushing to the sound, Tarzan sees Gazan, Teeka's balu, enfolded in the coils of Histah, the snake. In wonderment, he sees Teeka hurl herself upon the serpent in an attempt to save her child, though he knows her tremendous dread of the snake, only to become herself entrapped in its deadly embrace. Tarzan feels the same dread, but he hesitates no more than Teeka to leap upon the foe. After a fierce struggle, Tarzan drives his hunting knife into the serpent's brain.

The battle won, Tarzan once again falls into meditation. Why had he done what he did? Teeka did not belong to him. Her child was no special concern of his. He concludes that some power compelled him to act: "It must be that God made me do these things, for I never did them by myself.... I cannot see Him; but I know that it must be God who does these things."[54]

The definition of the word GOD he had discovered included the descriptor "all-powerful." This Tarzan comes to understand as being able to do what no one else can do: creation out of nothing of the world with all its beauty and provision and the instilling of compelling laws of moral action. He had found God—not as a physical presence as he had originally imagined, but as a spiritual presence and the source of all good things.

Tarzan's search for God is carried on in terms of general revelation, truths that can be known about God through nature and reflection upon it, rather than special revelation, divinely revealed law. Nonetheless, it is in connection to his contemplation of God that his true humanity begins to emerge as well as the capacity for functional, merciful, and meaningful human community.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that while Burroughs's telling of natural man is more detailed than the social contract theory accounts, it is not more imaginary. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau are all advancing hypothetical claims about natural man, the historical veracity of which is unprovable and largely unimportant to them. They all carry on the discussion of natural human drives, though they differ in the origins and operations of these drives from Aquinas and each other. Tarzan appears as an amalgam of accounts of natural man. While the drive for self-preservation is strong in Tarzan, as for Hobbes, he is capable of compassion, as for

[54] Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 61.

Rousseau. But Burroughs's presentation of Tarzan is more Aristotelian and Thomistic in his powers of reason and speech as well as a natural disposition towards society. For Rousseau, civilization deprives man of happiness, freedom, and strength through dependence upon others; perhaps he would counsel Tarzan to cease his striving and remain as he is, but that would not make a very good story—or very good politics.