

Participation and Theology: A Response to Schindler's "What's The Difference?"

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Schindler raises a compelling question: How can we uphold the goodness of creatures as creatures, the goodness of difference as difference, in a monotheistic context? Specifically, Christian philosophy asks whether in God there may be difference such that the difference of creatures from God might receive ultimate justification. In this paper, I note the strengths of Schindler's proposal, attempt to further his core concern by reference to Christ's theandric action, and present four criticisms. Chiefly, I ask whether Schindler observes with sufficient care the distinction between analogy and metaphor and whether, in the end, his solution begs the question.

In the Scriptures we read, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory" (Ps 115:1, RSV). As Kenneth Branagh portrays it, the men of England hymned the glory of God with these words from Psalm 115 after triumphantly destroying the French. Yet, what of the valor of the English? Was it nothing indeed? A newer revelation includes the anguish of Paul: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24).

The history of the effects of these texts among Christians is toilsome. The eclectic Gnostics found choice portions with which to defend their thesis that the creator God was evil. The Manicheans did likewise. Ancient and medieval Christians worked mightily to fight off these and recurring anti-Semitic forms of "Christianity." The image of Thomas Aquinas slamming his heavy fist on the King's table is particularly evocative. But Catholic Christianity, in part because of its corruption, provoked a return to dismal fascination with Paul's groaning. John Calvin proclaimed, "Their [i.e., infants'] whole nature is a seed of sin... [which is] only hateful and abhorrent to God."¹

Enlightenment thinkers were, quite understandably, not happy with this ante-proclamation of the Good News. Ludwig Feuerbach says it quite well in the title to par. 17 of the Appendix of his *The Christian Faith*: "What faith denies on earth it affirms in heaven; what it renounces here it recovers a hundred-fold there."² His criticism is not that Christianity is simply delayed gratification; it is rather that Christianity calls man "other" than God, giving God all the glory and man all the guilt and wretchedness of a sinner. If we are to bring the fire of our native *eros* back to Christianity, we would do well in assenting to the Enlightenment critique, yet not without a difference. Indeed, those who confess the thrice-holy God cannot join hands with Schleiermacher in his rereading of the Trinity as merely a way of speaking about the mono-

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 251. The Latin reads, "Imo tota eorum natura, quoddam est peccati semen: ideo non odiosa et abominabilis Deo esse non potest," Book II, chap. 1, no. 8.

² Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Christian Faith*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 316.

personal God. Today, we do well to attend to post-modernity's valorization of difference or alterity.

Professor Schindler has admirably striven to engage in Christian fashion post-modernity's concern to preserve difference in his remarkably broad and deep paper. It is well researched, speculatively original, and carefully articulated and argued. I am honored and also humbled to be a respondent to my colleague, with whom I have had a number of vigorous conversations, beginning in the early 90's at Catholic University.

My response is divided into three main parts: 1) a concise recapitulation of *some* of Schindler's key contributions; 2) a proposed application of these contributions to the theandric action of Christ; 3) suggestions and concerns.

Recapitulation of *Some* Key Contributions

I can hardly hope to be exhaustive here. First, Schindler puts his finger on the pulse of creaturely angst in identifying what I will call the excruciating dilemma or conundrum. Philosophically, a most perplexing question must be asked, a twist on Heidegger's question, "Why should there be anything?" The question is, "What accounts for difference?" The possible answers are unappetizing. As Schindler notes, "The alternatives would seem to be to affirm the Gnostic ultimacy of two principles, which is inherently irrational, or to affirm difference as an 'unjustifiable' fall from unity" (p. 4). Thomas would concur that, even if we were to entertain a "benign" Gnosticism, we would still be left with an irrational heap of juxtaposed created beings. Any harmony in the dissonance would result purely from chance.³ But, both fall and fate falter as answers to the question. Yet we are even more hard-pressed by a Jewish-Christian exigency, for the Scriptures affirm the goodness of creatures as creatures. The author of Wisdom attests: "For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it" (Wis 11:24). So, we can put the question differently: What accounts for the goodness of difference as difference? Schindler's lucid identification of this question and of the excruciating dilemma that faces those who face it is a most significant contribution.

Second, Schindler presents a serious defense of the goodness of created being. It is one thing to affirm that creatures are good, but it is, as we have seen, an arduous undertaking to exhibit this intelligibly to those who confess (or conclude to) one ultimate source of all that is. Schindler has striven mightily to do this. Key to his effort is affirming the goodness of difference as difference. An appropriate illustration of this contention might be the difference between the sensitivity of a dog and the knowledge of an angel. A dog can know and an angel can know, but they do so in different ways. However, the fact that a dog's mode of knowing is different from the angel's does not *eo ipso* mean that the dog's mode is a sheer fall from that of the angel. By rejecting a sheer fall among beings, Schindler means to reject, I believe, the notion that things "higher" sufficiently contain that which things "lower" contain in a simply lower manner. Such a

³ See Thomas's critique of Avicenna, ST 1.47.1. This critique would apply *a fortiori* to any form of polytheism.

notion of the hierarchy of beings' participating makes us wonder why there ought to be "lesser" things rather than no-things. Schindler rejects participation as fall; he wishes to say the opposite: The dog's mode is different and as different is good. Therefore, the dog's mode of knowing somehow exceeds that of the angel. The dog's mode of knowing adds to, rather than subtracts from, the manifestation of being or, to look at it from a different angle, the dog's mode adds to the harmony among beings. Of course, by stressing the "excess" of the participant, Schindler is not discountenancing the fact that the participant is also, in another respect, certainly less than the participated. Schindler's task—to defend the goodness of finite beings—leads him to stress one side of this reciprocity, although he clearly clarifies that the reciprocity between participant and participated is "asymmetrical."

Third, Schindler's affirmation of the goodness of difference as difference implies a positive stance in the debate about the "real" distinction between existence (*esse*) and essence. As Schindler notes, the rediscovery of "esse" in Thomistic thought led some philosophers to reduce essence to existence, thereby dissolving the distinction between them. As understandable as such dissolution is—for there is nothing outside of being—yet it nonetheless deprives essence of its determining character; it leaves unintelligible the fact that being actually is restricted in beings.⁴ Schindler is ultimately concerned that such a line of thinking ultimately implies the imperfection of finite being as finite.

Fourth, the second and third contributions come together nicely in Schindler's account of creation. Although there is a distinction between a creature and its *esse*, the creature is not simply "fallen" from the perfection of *esse*. How? Although the participant is not identical with the *esse* in which it participates, its non-identity, which is due to its essence principle, nonetheless contributes something positive without being in itself actual. Essence can make this contribution because it derives its perfection from God through the act of creation (pp. 26-27). Creaturely essence is a way in which God's being can be imitated. God himself renders creatures actual by constituting them as existent and as existent in certain ways. Thus, the positivity of the difference of essence does not need to reduce to non-subsistent *esse*, since God himself is the source of the positivity of both *esse* and essence. Therefore, the affirmation of the goodness of difference as difference—which affirmation one appears to want hold as implicit in Christian and Jewish faith—does not entail the demolition of the structure of participation: X receives its reality from or after Y.

Fifth, there are many theological riches in Schindler's argument. He carefully follows out the path of philosophical inquiry to wonder: may there be difference in God? Trinitarian

⁴ On this note, Schindler's thought accords with Wippel's defense of the real distinction. Wippel contends that essence as nonbeing is not "absolute nothing" but relative nonbeing. See John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, no. 1, Monographs of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 187–190. Wippel writes, "[W]ithin a given substance its essence principle receives and limits, to be sure, but also determines and specifies its correlative act of being. If essence is equated with absolute nonbeing, or even if it is viewed as nothing but a given mode or degree of existence, Thomas's way of accounting for the essential structure of particular beings will be severely compromised" (*Ibid*, 191).

revelation supplies an affirmative response. At this point, Schindler is in the company of much of recent theology, not without a difference, to be sure, but certainly in the good company of those who are returning to the riches latent within the Trinitarian doctrine, rebelling against Schleiermacher's mono-personalism.⁵

A Possible Theological Implication

Leaving the realm of contemporary theology aside, I would suggest that Schindler's insights harmonize well with significant elements of many Christian traditions, especially Catholic and Orthodox traditions. These elements have one common note: the reality of secondary causality. Schindler provides a metaphysical articulation that supports the Catholic and Orthodox conviction that created beings can and do exercise genuine secondary causality.

My basis for drawing out this implication of Schindler's thought is the following axiom: *operare sequitur esse*. The "esse" in this axiom stands rather for the concrete, subsisting *ens* than non-subsistent *esse*. Thus, to operate or to act follows upon the thing that is. This axiom enables us, if we accept Schindler's argument, to ground the claim that created beings genuinely act to bring about certain effects. Further, the contribution created beings make to their effects is not that which a mere puppet makes by the manipulation of its puppeteer—no genuine contribution. If limited beings are not simply "deficient" and therefore "fallen" participants of the participated, so too their actions are not simply "deficient," "fallen" manifestations of a putatively solitary source of action, the participated.

I will now, all-too-briefly, touch upon one area in which this general implication bears out: the theandric action of Christ and, within this, the sacramental dispensation of divine grace. At a certain point in the Christian tradition (though this development emerged from ancient seeds), some theologians came to distinguish the actions of Christ into three categories: properly divine, properly human, and theandric. I wish to focus on the third category, but first a word on the other two.

Actions properly divine are those that are accomplished by the Incarnate Son of God through his divine nature without the cooperation of his human nature. Such actions might include his "having coming forth" ("coming forth" eternally) from the Father⁶ or his being "begotten" of the Father.⁷ Turning to the realm of the Son's creative action, one can think of all

⁵ For a superb example of retrieval of patristic thought, relevant in this regard, see Khaled Anatolios, "The Immediately Triune God: A Patristic Response to Schleiermacher," *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001): 159–178.

⁶ εἰς τὸν Πατέρα (Jn 8:42). Jerome renders both this and εἰς τὸν Πατέρα (Jn 15:26) with forms of the Latin "procedere." This was unfortunate even if inevitable; it continues to cause difficulties between East (from the Father through the Son, or [as Photius would have it] from the Father 'alone') and West (*filioque*: from the Father and from the Son). Nevertheless, despite the need for distinction here, if the two "comings forth" from the Father are not to be absolutely equivocal—in no way analogical—then one cannot simply be faulted for grouping them both under the Latin "procedere," at least in theological reflection (not scriptural translation). Creedal issues are another matter.

⁷ Whether the New Testament reveals eternal generation is sometimes disputed. Systematic theologians approach the Scriptural witness in terms of Newman's analysis of inference by "convergent probabilities." The very names "Son" and "Father" suggest a generation. The divinity of the Son in the overall witness would require an eternal

things being created “through him” (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). “To create” is an a-temporal action (Heb 1:3) not predicable of the Son with respect to his human nature.⁸ Of course, some might dispute the very category of “properly” divine actions, arguing that I am being a bit Nestorian. Yet, this category has a strong place in tradition, a place thought to have been safely guarded from such a heresy.⁹

Actions “properly” human are those that require no advertence to the divine nature to explain or account for the production of the effect. Such actions might include Jesus’ being hungry, sleeping, digesting, etc. These actions are sufficiently accounted for by advertence to Jesus’ human nature. There is a human operation—distinct from the divine operation—by which Jesus accomplishes many actions. At this point, however, I must make a significant qualification with respect to this category. Jesus’ human nature is not autonomous with respect to his divine nature. I would thus distance myself from what I think is problematic in Karl Rahner’s reflections on Christ as mediator.¹⁰ All of his human actions are directed, ultimately, by the efficacy of the divine nature. This is true not simply because all created effects are in the hands of divine providence. Ineffably more forcefully, this is true because Jesus’ actions are those of the divine Son of God. Two points are in order. First, the Son infallibly directs his human actions—without excluding his human freedom—by his divine nature. Further, his human actions are actions of the divine Son.¹¹ Therefore, every human action is in fact an action of the Son of God. Any human action of Christ can, therefore, be called “theandric.” Nevertheless, the

generation. There are also the texts identifying the Son as “Only-begotten,” with the Greek “monogenh;V” (see Jn 1:14; 3:16; and 1 Jn 4:19). We even see “monogenh;V qeo;V” in Jn 1:18. On text critical issues pertaining to “monogenes theos,” see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 169-70. Finally, the monotheism ineliminable from Christianity requires that one hypostasis be source without source, radically first; the East expresses this by the doctrine of the monarchy of the Father.

⁸ Aquinas and Bonaventure agree, against Avicenna, that no created thing can be given power to create (see Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.45.5 and Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, II, chap. 1, par. 2).

⁹ Pope Agatho hints at this category in his “suggestion,” writing, “Jesus ... in his holy Gospels shews forth in some instances human things, in others divine, and still in others both together, making a manifestation concerning himself in order that he might instruct his faithful to believe and preach that he is both true God and true man” in Pope St. Agatho, “The Letter of Agatho, Pope of Old Rome, to the Emperor,” in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, ed. Henry Percival, vol. 14, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 333a.

¹⁰ Rahner writes, “The real initiative, in some true sense, of the man Jesus with regard to God [should be] given its *genuine* (anti-monotheistic) meaning.” “Should be” is my interpretation of Rahner’s meaning in context. At first sight, Rahner’s reasoning appears to mirror the core concern Schindler presents in his paper: Rahner warns that Christ must not be made into “a mere ‘manifestation’ of God himself and ultimately of him alone, such that the ‘appearance’ has no independent validity at all with respect to the one who appears.” Karl Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology,” in *God, Christ, Mary, Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst, vol. 1, *Theological Investigations* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 156. Rahner’s desire to defend against docetism is laudable, but his introduction of an “independent ‘I-center’” (*ibid*, 159) into the humanated Word leaves something to be desired. Most problematic is his suggestion—in tension with the 6th of Cyril’s 12 canons, upheld as a test of orthodoxy by Constantinople II—that Jesus the man faces the eternal Son in adoration: Rahner attributes to Jesus “a genuine, spontaneous, free, spiritual, active center, a human selfconsciousness, which as creaturely faces the eternal Word in a genuinely human attitude of adoration, obedience, a most radical sense of creaturehood” (*ibid*, 158).

¹¹ The communication of idioms demands at least the following: first, that nothing said of one nature can be predicated of the other nature abstractly; second, that whatever is said of either nature must be predicated of the one divine person.

term has in certain theological traditions come to be used with greater precision, namely, to stand for actions in which the human nature is instrumentally used to accomplish effects properly divine.¹² Notwithstanding this qualification, these actions demand no recourse to the divine nature in terms of the sufficient explanation of their effects. Thus, they fall under the category “strictly” human, to be understood in light of this qualification.

Finally, we come to the third category, theandric actions. The term “theandric” appears to have first been employed in the 5th century by Dionysius the (pseudo-) Areopagite, in his epistle to the monk, Gaius.¹³ The term has meant different things to different theologians. It came to be employed by those supportive of the heresy called monoenergism (solely one divine-human operation in Christ) and was condemned as such by Pope St. Martin I in a synod at the Lateran in A.D. 649. It was there that Maximus defended Martin against the imperial heresy.¹⁴ Yet, the orthodoxy of Dionysius was not to be lost, and Damascene read him in a manner that supported the two operations, distinct but inseparable. John of Damascene thus rescued Dionysius from the abuse of heretics.¹⁵ Later in certain traditions, the term came to be used to stand for those actions by which the Son produces effects that, according to their very character, are not able to be produced by the human nature but which are in fact produced through the co-operation of the human nature. Two criteria are involved in isolating theandric actions: the effect can be sufficiently accounted for only by recourse to the divine nature; yet the effect is in fact worked out through the mediation of the human nature.

The theo-logic behind this category is as follows. On the one hand, every nature has its proper operation; on the other hand, the human nature is truly divinized and (it may safely be added) divinizing. Agatho supplies the logic for the first premise and explicitly holds the second. As to the first, he contends, “No nature can have anything or any motion which pertains to another nature but only that which is naturally given by creation.”¹⁶ Thus, the divine nature cannot have a human motion, nor can the human nature have a properly divine motion. Notwithstanding, this important axiom does not prevent the “deification” of the human nature of Jesus. Thus, Jesus’ human nature is “transfigured” without being destroyed or altered (made other).¹⁷ Jesus’ “being deified” in his human nature is strictly a passion (not an action). Nevertheless, when he is considered to “redeem” us through his cross, to “forgive” us by his words of consolation, to “deify” us through his life-giving flesh (as Cyril describes it), when he does these things, he produces effects that can be accounted for only by the divine nature, yet he

¹² Spanish theologians Fernando Ocáriz et al. state in sober fashion, “The conservation in existence of all creation (cf. Heb 1:3) is a divine action of Jesus; his speaking, walking etc. are human actions; his theandric actions are the miracles, in which through his human action (speaking, etc.), his divinity produces an effect which only God can bring about (for example, raising a dead person to life).” F. Ocáriz, L.F. Mateo Seco, and J.A. Riestra, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ: A Christology and Soteriology Textbook*, trans. Michael Adams and James Gavigan (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1994), 102.

¹³ For brief history of the term, see David Coffey, “The Theandric Nature of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 405–431, here, 407. See also, A. Michel, “Théandrique [opération],” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Ané, 1946), vol. 15.1, col. 205–216.

¹⁴ See Coffey, 407.

¹⁵ See Coffey, 407f.

¹⁶ Agatho, 334b.

¹⁷ Agatho, 334a, 334b, and 335b.

does so precisely through his human nature. Supporting this reading is Constantinople II's condemnation of the chief hero of the neo-Chalcedonians, Theodore of Mopsuestia. Constantinople II rejected Theodore's reading of Jn 20:22–23, the scene in which Jesus breathes on his disciples, pours forth the Spirit, and endows them with authority to forgive sins. According to the council, Theodore read the scene thus: "When after the resurrection the Lord breathed upon his disciples, saying, 'Receive the Holy Ghost,' he did not really give them the Holy Spirit, but ... he breathed upon them only as a sign."¹⁸ One sees implicitly contained in this condemnation both Christological and sacramental implications. Jesus' action in this passage is not to be divided into two separate actions, each achieved by a distinct hypostasis. Clearly, the breathing is "properly" human (with the due qualification). Clearly, too, "sending the Spirit" is properly divine. However, the council suggests that the two actions form a unity, so that the sending is accomplished through the breathing and the words said humanly. The human action is not merely significant of a separate divine action. Rather, through the human action the divine effect is accomplished.

Theandric actions thus involve a special participation of the human nature in the divine *activity*. As Thomas Aquinas describes such actions, they involve the employment of the human nature as special instrument of the divine power.¹⁹ The human nature enjoys the influx of divine energy so that what are properly divine effects are accomplished through the mediation of the human nature. Thus, the human nature is a special instrument of the divine energy; it is not merely the sign and guarantee that the deed stated humanly will be accomplished (is being accomplished) by the separate action of the divinity. Thomas states, "By way of efficiency ... Christ's flesh, wherein He endured the Passion, is the instrument of the Godhead, so that His sufferings and actions operate with Divine power for expelling sin."²⁰

The term "instrument" calls to our 21st century minds something quite utilitarian and un-free. To appreciate Thomas's claim that Christ's human nature participates in the power of the divine causality, we should turn to the characteristics he associates with a usefully employed instrument. There are three: 1) it cannot bring about the effect on its own; 2) it does have the necessary characteristics to contribute dispositively to its effect; and 3) in light of these characteristics, aspects of its effect are due to its proper operation.²¹ Let us take a saw as an

¹⁸ Constantinople II, in Percival, *op. cit.*, 315.

¹⁹ See disputed question *De unione verbi incarnati*, art. 5, esp. ad 1, 2. Ad 1 introduces the category of "instrument" to articulate Jesus' accomplishing our salvation through his human nature. Ad. 2 speaks of a healing miracle: "Put a quod divina virtus sanabat leprosum coexistente tactu humani corporis, qui sortiebatur efficaciam ex virtute divina." This treatise was written around Easter, 1272. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 336f. To be sure, Thomas will speak of any of Christ's human actions as "instrumental" with respect to the divine person; however, he also speaks of certain human actions as "instrumental" in a special way, as sharing the power to achieve something surpassing the capacity of Jesus' human nature.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, ST 3.49.1. Trans. Benzinger; see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, NY: Benzinger Bros., 1948; Reprint, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics). When stated, the translation is from the Benzinger edition. Otherwise, translations are mine.

²¹ See Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Jan A. Aertsen, with Anthony P. Runia, vol. 46, *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 170–75. See also, Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.45.5.

initially helpful example: a) a saw cannot cut by itself, for it must be wielded by another; b) but a saw is jagged, sharp, and hard enough to contribute to the effect of cutting wood; and c) cutting wood is its proper operation. A saw is thus a usefully employed “instrument” of cutting. When an instrument is wielded it participates in the power of the primary agent to achieve an effect.

Thomas calls the Son’s humanity the “conjoined instrument” of the divinity, in distinction from the sacramental action, which is a “separated instrument.” The Son of God, the primary agent, brings about certain effects in virtue of his divine nature through a) the mediation of his human nature and b) the mediation of a creaturely event (a sacrament). For Thomas, precisely through sacraments, and not merely at their occasion, the incarnate Word produces the divine effect, grace.²²

A brief contrast of Thomas’s thought with Bonaventure’s is illuminating in this regard, and, I hope, reaffirms my conviction that Schindler’s thesis has positive implications for Christ’s theandric action. Bonaventure desired not to affirm that Christ’s human nature participated in the divine *efficient* causality. In his commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences*, he states of Christ’s passion and resurrection, “To neither of them ... can one properly attribute the causality of justification or the destruction of sin, since here one does not find properly any genus of causality.”²³ He admits that the passion and death can be considered meritorious and disposing causes. Yet, he denies to them any efficiency.²⁴ Bonaventure agrees that “It is only God who destroys iniquities” in the sense of an efficient cause,²⁵ for God alone actually infuses grace.²⁶ This opinion appears to remain later as well,²⁷ although his language in sermons, perhaps less scientifically precise, is more evocative of causality.²⁸

Not surprisingly, Bonaventure also rejects the idea that sacraments are efficient causes of grace. He observes the following argument against efficient causality, “Every efficient cause is nobler than its effect. Nothing corporeal is nobler than anything spiritual. Since therefore grace is

²² See Thomas Aquinas, ST 3.62.4.

²³ “Attem neutri, id est nec resurrectioni nec passioni, attribui potest proprie causalitas iustificationis sive deletio culpa, quia non invenitur ibi proprie aliquod genus causae, sicut in opponendo ostensum est.” Bonaventure, *Liber III Sententiarum*, dist. 19, art. 1, q. 1, resp., in vol. 3, *Opera theologica selecta* (Quaracchi, 1941), 393a.

²⁴ “Habent tamen nihilominus aliquam causalitatem in hoc quod habent aliquam causae proprietatem. Attribuitur enim his iustificatio nostra per modum meriti intervenientis, quod quidem habet dispositionis rationem et reduci habet ad causam materiale; per modum exempli provocantis et excitantis, quod quidem habet reduci ad causam moventem et efficientem; per modum exemplaris regulantis, quod quidem habet reduci ad causam formalem; per modum termini quietantis, quod quidem habet reduci ad causam finalem” (*ibid*, 393a).

²⁵ Ad illud quod obicitur, quod solus Deus est qui delet iniquitates etc., dicendum quod verum est per modum efficientis (*ibid*, ad 2, 393b).

²⁶ “Ad illud quod obicitur, quod iustificatio est per gratiam, quae infunditur a solo Deo, dicendum quod, etsi gratia a solo Deo habeat infundi, nihilominus tamen Christus per suam passionem potuit eam nobis promereri; et sic dicimur a passione iustificari” (*ibid*, ad 3, 393b–94a).

²⁷ In speaking of the grace of headship in the Breviloquium (c. 1257), Bonaventure writes, “quod plenitudinem habuit meriti, non tantum respectu *sui*, sed etiam respectu *nostri*, quibus, sicut omnia spiritualia, quae habemus, influit ratione Deitatis, sic meruit ratione assumptae humanitatis.” Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, IV, chap. 7, par. 4, in *Tria Opuscula Sermones Theologici*, vol. 5, *Opera theologica Selecta* (Quaracchi, 1964), 90b (underscore mine).

²⁸ “Baptisma enim habet virtutem conferendi gratiam a virtute et efficacia passionis Christi...” Bonaventure, *De Verbo incarnato*, serm. 3.2, A, par. 4 (*ibid*, 268a). This sermon dates from 1257.

spiritual, and a sacrament corporeal, as Hugh says, no sacrament is the efficient cause of grace itself.”²⁹ It is worth remarking that Bonaventure’s commentary on the Sentences is highly subtle and shows praiseworthy openness of mind. He does not blush to conclude, “*Nescio!* (I do not know).” Despite his openness to the various points of view on sacramental causality, he ultimately sides with this argument against efficient causality.³⁰ I would note that the argument he observes is valid in itself, but it prescinds from the category of instrumental or secondary efficient causality.

Subsequently, he observes the following argument explicitly against instrumental causality: “Order ought to be preserved among agents. Therefore, God ought not to flow into (*influre*) something more noble through (*per*) something less noble. But the soul is nobler than a sacrament. Therefore God does not pour grace into the soul through a sacrament. Therefore grace is effectively from God alone.”³¹ Bonaventure seems to agree with this opinion.

Complexity arises, however, when Bonaventure considers whether sacraments have a certain spiritual power by which they communicate their effects. He entertains the possibility that they do but favors the opinion that they do not.³² Thomas himself argues that to accept the

²⁹ “Omnis causa efficiens est nobilior suo effectu, et nullum corporale nobilius est aliquo spiritali. Cum igitur gratia sit spiritalis, sacramentum corporale, ut dicit Hugo, nullum sacramentum est causa efficiens ipsius gratiae.” Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 1, p. 1, art. 1, q. 4, A, contra [a], in vol. 4, *Opera theologica selecta* (Quaracchi, 1949), 12. This statement appears in the “Sed contra,” to which he does not reply. Here, he replies to the “Videtur.”

³⁰ It is worth noting that in presenting an opinion that is acceptable but that he does not favor, he does not even introduce the category “instrumental cause” or “secondary efficient cause.” Rather, he introduces the category *causae sine qua non* (causes without which the effect will not be produced). He presents the opinion of “some” who defend the existence of a created power in the sacraments as follows. In the sacramental event three things concur (run together): the soul with its malady and debt, the grace of God working interiorly, and the power of the sacrament working exteriorly. He suggests that grace enjoys a greater efficacy in its operation due to the mediation of the sacrament. Remarkably, these affirmations do not amount to the claim Thomas makes, namely, that sacramental action is wielded by God as an event through which he communicates sanctifying grace. Bonaventure writes, “Sic in sacramento est anima habens defectum et debilitatem potentiarum; est iterum gratia in anima intus operans; est iterum virtus sacramenti exterior; et his concurrentibus roborantur et sanantur potentiae et gratia fit efficacior in sua operatione mediante virtute sacramenti. Sic ergo dicunt quod sacramentum est causa gratiae ut sine qua non, scilicet gratum facientis.” Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 1, pars 1, art. 1, q. 4, resp., p. 14b. Interestingly, however, he suggests that sacraments are efficient causes of “character.” What he means by this is not evident to me. Nevertheless, in the *Breviloquium* he denies sacraments efficient power to produce grace: “Huiusmodi Sacramenta dicuntur gratiae vasa et causa, non quia gratia in eis substantialiter contineatur nec causaliter efficiatur, cum in sola anima habeat collocari et a solo Deo habeat infundi; sed quia in illis et per illa gratiam curationis a summo medico Christo ex divino decreto oporteat hauriri.” Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, VI, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 125b. He does not entertain the possibility of secondary efficient causality.

³¹ “Ordo debet servari in agentibus: ergo Deus per minus nobile non debet influere in magis nobile; sed anima nobilior est sacramento: ergo Deus non influit per sacramentum gratiam in animam: ergo gratia a solo Deo est effective.” Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 1, pars 1, art. 1, q. 4, contra [f], pp. 12b–13a. The translation of the final clause comes from www.franciscan-archive.org (hereafter, Franciscan Archive). Note that in his own response to the question, he even includes a Christological point: “Ad illud quod obicitur quod Christus potentior est in bonum, dicunt quod verum est; nec tamen sequitur ex hoc, quodsi Adam transmittit culpam mediante carne, quod Christus transmittat gratiam mediante sacramento: nam istud esset inordinatio.” He does not distinguish this rejection from his rejection of the opinion (which Thomas also rejects) that God can cause a creature to create: “Praeterea, sicut creatura non potest recipere potestatem creandi, sic nec dandi gratiam” (*ibid*, ad A, 6, p. 15b).

³² Here, his “Ad obiecta” C allows that the sacraments may have such a power; however, he adds a lengthy section (*ibid*, ad D, 16b–18a) proposing an opposing opinion, which he favors. In “Ad obiecta” C (16), we find him

sacraments as special instrumental causes that communicate grace is logically to imply that they participate in the divine power and therefore have transiently a created power by which to bring about their effects, chiefly, sanctifying grace. In contrast, Bonaventure's favored opinion runs as follows: "And if you ask whether the sacraments have some created power over and above the uncreated power, they [those theologians with the more fitting opinion] respond that the sacraments can be said to have some power in addition to the uncreated power, but by an extended sense of the word 'power.'"³³ The sacraments have no "ontological," instrumental power. By a divine pact, God has so ordained them to move him that they efficaciously move him to bestow grace. Whenever they are enacted (*ex opere operato*), God infallibly acts to give grace. Thus, sacraments are merely "said" to have power and causality according to a common way of speaking. In Thomistic terms, Bonaventure's opinion is that sacraments are causal only according to metaphor or by a very weak extension of the term "cause."

Illuminating in this regard are the Scriptural and cultural images Bonaventure employs. As to the first, he recalls Naaman's healing. Naaman was healed not through water nor through the prophet's words but at the occasion of his bathing in the appropriate location because God had made a pact to cleanse him should he bathe there.³⁴ Bonaventure opines, should God have instituted by divine pact that such bathing would continue to cure others, the divine power—alone causative of the cure—would always "assist" or "stand by." The efficacy of New Testament sacraments, Bonaventure proposes, involves a similar divine pact.³⁵ His cultural image has become the hallmark of the Franciscan "moral" theory of sacramental causality:

Therefore just as the royal letters sealed with ring of the king are of a great dignity and virtue and value and are said (to be documents) great both to be able and to do, nevertheless [tamen] in them there is no *absolute* virtue, but only an *ordination* through the assistance of the royal virtue — which is clear, because, with the king dead, there is no more care [non plus curatur] of his letters than of others, however, they have lost nothing absolute — thus must it be

identifying the power with a spiritual accident that works as does purgatorial fire. He first introduces the comparison to purgatorial fire in his response (*ibid*, resp., 14b). The fire works "secundum ordinem divinae iustitiae" while the sacraments work "secundum ordinem divinae misericordiae." The comparison is illuminating, once we consider what his view of the purgative causality of the fire. Bonaventure favors the opinion that the fire purifies simply as an external affliction supplying the occasion for grace to work interiorly in the good will of the deceased, who thereby undergo the due punishment as purifying penance. See Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 21, pars 1, art. 2, q. 1, resp., 541a. See also Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, pars. 7, cap. 2, par. 6, 159a. He thinks less highly of the opinion that the fire has a certain spiritual power through which God cleanses the soul.

³³ "Et si tu quaeras, utrum habeant virtutem aliquam creatam super increatam, respondent quod praeter virtutem increatam est dicere aliquam virtutem habere sacramentum, sed extenso nomine virtutis." Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 1, pars 1, art. 1, q. 4, "Ad obiecta" D, 17a.

³⁴ "Ad verbum Elisaei, Naaman se lavante, astitit virtus divina effectiva sanitatis et devotio et obedientia Naaman dispositiva; nulla tamen causalitas fuit nec in verbo Elisaei nec in aqua Iordanis." Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 1, pars 1, art. 1, q. 4, "Ad obiecta" D, 16b–17a.

³⁵ "Sic in sacramentis dicunt quod ad prolationes verbi assistit virtus divina aquis et infundit gratiam et regenerat, dum homo subicit se per fidei professionem et obedientiam. Dicunt ergo quod sacramenta dicuntur habere virtutem et dicuntur causa et dicuntur efficere secundum communem modum loquendi propter assistentiam divinae virtutis" (*ibid*, 17a).

understood in the Sacraments, and thus do the authorities speak of the Holy Things [Sanctorum] according to the common usage [usum].³⁶

The sacraments are like pledges, which bear no power except the divine ordination. They are not causes in the proper sense of the word. They are neither primary efficient causes nor secondary, instrumental efficient causes. They effect what they signify because God has struck a pact with us, promising to deliver his grace when the rite is properly performed.³⁷ Bonaventure insists that the faith is not repugnant to this opinion and that reason consents to it.³⁸

All this said, we must not neglect to include Bonaventure's salutary closing: "Therefore we concede, that the Sacraments of the New Law are a *cause* and *do effect* and *do dispose*, by an extended name, as has been said, and this is safe to say; but whether they have (something) more, I neither want to affirm nor to deny. And according to this last way all (those things) asked are clear."³⁹

It is against this background that one can appreciate more fully Aquinas's teaching that sacraments are instrumental causes of grace, having a genuine though secondary and transient power to effect what they signify.⁴⁰ One can appreciate all the more Thomas's reading of some of Christ's actions as theandric (in the way specified above). I believe Schindler's thesis points in favor of Thomas's opinions on these matters. I turn now to several concerns about Schindler's argument.

Suggestions and Concerns

Hierarchy as Fall or as Ordered Whole of Irreducibly Different Parts?

I suggest that one can further ground Schindler's core concern—to affirm the goodness of creatures as creatures—by examining difference relationally and by attending to the hierarchical structure of created being. Before offering a brief sketch in this direction, I wish to draw several distinctions regarding the terms "imperfection" and "evil."

Schindler engagingly protests the "fallout" of both Plato's and Plotinus's schemes of participation. Insofar as one is *not* the Good, one is *not* good. Difference from the Good renders one un-like the Good, the more so the more one differs from the Good. As we "descend" from the Good, we stumble upon a progressive dilution in the hierarchy of things fallen from the Good to a greater and greater degree. Schindler observes that since the Good is perfect, to be not good is to be imperfect. He concludes: To be imperfect is to be defective; to be defective is to be fallen

³⁶ *Ibid* (translation, Franciscan Archive).

³⁷ Pledges of Christ's merits, these sacraments draw the Holy Spirit down, according to Bonaventure's "moral" theory. See Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1947), 568.

³⁸ "Huic positioni pietas fidei non repugnant et ratio consentit." Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, dist. 1, pars. 1, art. 1, q. 4, "Ad obiecta" D, 17b.

³⁹ *Ibid* (translation, Franciscan Archive).

⁴⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, ST 3.62.4.

or evil. Although I concur with Schindler's insistence that creatures as creatures are good, I suggest that the slide from imperfection to evil calls for qualification.⁴¹

Thomas describes imperfection with respect to its contrary, perfection. Imperfection is simply the lack of some perfection. Imperfection is removed by the advent of the perfection.⁴² Although evil is necessarily imperfection, imperfection is not necessarily evil. Evil is a species of imperfection: it is lack of a *due* perfection.⁴³ Now, there are two types of "due perfection," physical and volitional. Lack of a good due to one's physical makeup constitutes physical evil: the loss of an arm, blindness, etc. Lack of proper volitional order to the divine good will is moral evil.⁴⁴ Physical and moral evil are radically different. Moral evil implies fault and sin, whereas physical evil implies neither.⁴⁵ Therefore, physical evil is called "evil" only metaphorically.

Now, there are imperfections that properly accompany the state of certain things. Take, for example, things that develop towards their perfections.⁴⁶ That some things do "not yet" have the perfections to which they are ordained does not render them evil, only mobile. To be mobile, in the most general sense of the term, is to be able to change. Following Thomas and Aristotle, I would define motion as follows: the act of something potential insofar as it is potential.⁴⁷ Potency is related to act as imperfection to perfection. Thus, intrinsic to the nature of motion is imperfection, but this imperfection is not an evil.

Finally, things can be considered imperfect relative to one another in that one attains a higher end than another or that one attains the same end more excellently than another. Those that attain a lesser end can be considered "imperfect" in comparison to those that attain a higher end, since the former lack the end the latter have. There are grades of being—the more perfect and the less perfect—but this "hierarchical differentiation" does not imply that any "level" is evil. (by contrast, see p. 13). My conviction is that attention to the hierarchy of created being in the thought of Thomas Aquinas might further ground Schindler's core concern. Thomas's thought on hierarchy is intimately linked with his relational understanding of difference, which I link with Thomas's term "division."

⁴¹ This slide appears throughout the paper: See pp. 4, 13-14, 18, 23, 24.

⁴² "Perfectio adveniens tollit imperfectionem sibi oppositam." Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.62.7, ad 1.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.49.1.

⁴⁴ In every evil act, there is some unintelligible disconnect between the *factum* and the divine order. Although one may correlate the physical elements of an evil act (e.g., hijackers and a plane, soldiers and a nation) and even many of its intentional elements (motives, habits, circumstances, etc.), one cannot correlate the moral defect itself with the divine truth and goodness in any way whatsoever. See Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, vol. 1, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 113–16 and 331–32.

⁴⁵ Except if we consider the *fact* of human suffering as necessarily tied with the primal human transgression, with Rom 5:12

⁴⁶ See Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.95.3.

⁴⁷ See Thomas Aquinas, ST 1–2.67.4 and *In XI Met*, lectio 9, esp. par. 2294. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XI, chap. 9. According to Guy Mansini, Aristotle's definition of motion is the only adequate definition man has ever produced. See Guy Mansini, "Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity" *The Thomist* 64 (2000), 517–19).

Since division is a transcendental, I turn to the work of Jan Aertsen, who has supplied a lucid analysis of Thomas's deduction of the transcendentals. The transcendentals follow upon being and are thus present universally. However, we do not comprehend all transcendentals at once, according to Thomas. Rather, we arrive at them in a determinate order, in accordance with the way we know. Aertsen sums up: We arrive first at "being," second at "non-being" (simple negation), third, at "division" (this being is not that being), fourth at "one" (this being is not divided in itself), and fifth at "multitude" (a transcendental concept, not reducible to number/plurality).⁴⁸ Aertsen observes that the movement from step 1 to step 2 is acceptable but the movement from step 2 (non-being) to step 3 (division) is not readily discernible. Aertsen supplies a compelling link: Thomas also understands the term "thing" (*res*) as a transcendental, especially in his "central text," *De veritate* 1.1.⁴⁹ Thomas there distinguishes absolute and relational transcendentals. Absolute transcendentals do not involve relation; chief among these is being. We can refer to that which is under the aspect of its quiddity or essence. To do this, we employ the term "thing (*res*)."⁵⁰ Since essence involves, in all creatures, limitation of the act of being, there appears to be non-being indirectly associated with the transcendental "thing (*res*)."⁵¹ When we compare two things (*res* and *res*), we proceed relationally. We can then affirm that this being is not that being: this thing (*res*) is not that thing (*res*).⁵¹ This affirmation is division, also a transcendental, but relative and not absolute. We can use the word "something" (*aliquid* or *aliud quid*) to signify (this) thing as not being another thing.⁵²

Aertsen rightly emphasizes the dependence of the use of the term "aliquid" upon "res." Beings are not divided from each other insofar as they have being but "insofar as they have determinate modes of being."⁵³ The movements from step 3 to step 4 and from step 4 to step 5 are straightforward. Step 4, "one," follows division as its negation: This being is *not* divided from itself. With step 5, we arrive at "multitude." Multitude involves the affirmation of division and indivision. It requires more than one, so that one being is not another being; this is division or alterity. At the same time, the transcendental "multitude" implies the integrity of each being, for each being must be undivided from itself.⁵⁴ To sum up: division, with which I would link difference, is a relational transcendental. Given that it is relational, division is best contemplated

⁴⁸ Multitude is to be distinguished from multiplicity, for the former is a transcendental concept not reducible to number (multiplicity), which measures material beings. See Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Jan Aertsen, vol. 52, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 221.

⁴⁹ Aertsen, 222.

⁵⁰ "Non autem invenitur aliquid affirmative dictum absolute quod possit accipi in omni ente, nisi essentia eius, secundum quam esse dicitur; et sic imponitur hoc nomen *res*, quod in hoc differt ab ente, secundum Avicennam in principio metaphys, quod ens sumitur ab actu essendi, sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem vel essentiam entis. Negatio autem consequens omne ens absolute, est indivisio; et hanc exprimit hoc nomen unum: nihil aliud enim est unum quam ens indivisum." Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, 1.1.

⁵¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *In X Met*, lectio 4, par. 1997.

⁵² "Uno modo secundum divisionem unius ab altero; et hoc exprimit hoc nomen aliquid: dicitur enim aliquid quasi aliud quid; unde sicut ens dicitur unum, in quantum est indivisum in se, ita dicitur aliquid, in quantum est ab aliis divisum." Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, 1.1.

⁵³ Aertsen, 223.

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.30.3.

not of things in isolation but of things in relation to one another: This thing is not that thing; this thing is none of the other things that are (and the same applies for everything that is).

If we proceed in this way, we are led quite readily to Thomas's conception of the universe as a hierarchically heterogeneous whole composed of irreducibly diverse parts.⁵⁵ For Thomas, a hierarchical vision of created reality is a given: "Therefore, it is necessary that all things that are diversified according to a diverse participation of being, so that they are more perfect or less perfect, are caused by one first being, which exists most perfectly."⁵⁶ Notwithstanding this hierarchical vision, Thomas affirms that creatures "lower" in the hierarchy express the divine goodness in ways that creatures "higher" in the hierarchy do not and cannot: "Because God's goodness cannot be sufficiently represented by one creature, he produced many and diverse creatures, so that what is lacking to one in representing the divine goodness may be supplied from another. For, the goodness which is in God simply and uniformly is in creatures in a divided and multiplied manner."⁵⁷ The reason higher creatures can rightly be said to fail *with respect to lower creatures* is the surpassing goodness of God. So, it is the failure of higher creatures with respect to God that frees up lower creatures to be good in ways higher creatures cannot. Hence, Thomas shares Schindler's affirmation that the "not" present in difference bespeaks an irreducible perfection, irreducible, that is, to some being higher in the created hierarchy.

Thomas leads his reader to contemplate created differences in their relational totality: the difference of some being (*aliquid*) from another (*aliquid*) constitutes partially the goodness of the whole. Thomas writes, "Thus the whole universe more perfectly participates and represents the divine goodness than any other creature."⁵⁸ Faithful to Schindler's concern and Thomas's opinion, we might rephrase this: therefore, the whole as a whole is the better for different things. As far as his vision of creation goes, Thomas is as far from Plotinus's reduction of beauty to unity as is possible for a Christian. On this score, Aertsen notes that "multitude" is anything but imperfection: "The thesis that multitude is a sign of perfection is the complement of Thomas's view on the transcendental of the 'many,' for transcendentals express general perfections of

⁵⁵ For the affirmation of hierarchy as intrinsic to created beings, which more or less approach the perfection of God, see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.44.1; 1.47.2. He speaks of an ordered multitude or heterogeneous whole, the parts of which have not the form of the whole (ST 1.11.2, ad 2). The unity of world-order is attributable ultimately to one principle, God (ST 1.11.3).

⁵⁶ "Necesse est igitur omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi, ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte, causari ab uno primo ente, quod perfectissime est." Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.44.1.

⁵⁷ "Et quia per unam creaturam sufficienter repraesentari non potest, produxit multas creaturas et diversas, ut quod deest uni ad repraesentandam divinam bonitatem, suppleatur ex alia: nam bonitas quae in Deo est simpliciter et uniformiter, in creaturis est multipliciter et divisim." Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.47.1.

⁵⁸ "Unde perfectius participat divinam bonitatem, et repraesentat eam, totum universum, quam alia quaecumque creatura" (ST 1.47.1). So we read in Genesis that on the first five days God pronounced each thing "good" but on the sixth day he pronounced all things "very good." Thomas writes, "It is the part of the best agent to produce an effect which is best in its entirety; but this does not mean that He makes every part of the whole the best absolutely, but [best] in proportion to the whole; in the case of an animal, for instance, its goodness would be taken away if every part of it had the dignity of an eye. Thus, therefore, God also made the universe to be best as a whole, according to the mode of a creature; whereas he did not make each single creature best, but one better than another" (ST 1.47.2, ad 1; translation, Benzinger). Here, before citing Genesis, Thomas is obviously hinting at 1 Cor. 12. In fact, "Inequality comes from the perfection of the whole" (*ibid*, ad 3; translation, Benzinger).

being.”⁵⁹ Aertsen draws attention to a particularly startling text from Thomas, a text that explosively affirms Schindler’s core concern: ST 1.50.3. We hear in this text that multitude implies perfection. Since multitude is a sign of perfection, the more perfect (creatures) are, the more of them there will be: “Hence it must be said that the angels, even inasmuch as they are immaterial substances, exist in exceeding great number, far beyond all material multitude.”⁶⁰ When we think of hierarchy, we usually picture a progressive “thinning out” at the top. Thomas turns this “pyramidal” structure on its head, but without losing hierarchy!

I suggest that an examination of Thomas’s thought on relationally whole multitudes—whether this be the Universe, the Mystical Body of Christ, or something even greater—would provide grounds for furthering the core of Schindler’s thesis. I would maintain that considering difference relationally and with respect to the whole does not annihilate difference. Rather, it explores difference in a way that accords with its nature. Now I turn to my second concern.

From “excess” vis-à-vis *esse* to “excess” vis-à-vis any *participatum*?

Key to Schindler’s thesis is the claim that the one participating must enjoy some excess vis-à-vis that in which it participates. He writes, “There has to be some sense in which the *participans* exceeds the *participatum*, however paradoxical that may seem. More concretely, it means, for example, that the sensible world would have to exceed the intelligible world *in some positive way*, and not simply by virtue of a progressive dilution” (p. 14).

My question is, does the excess of the subsistent image—or, likewise, the excess of the non-subsistent essence—in relation to a non-subsistent perfection serve as warrant to conclude to some excess of every *participans* in relation to its *participatum*? Most precisely, do Schindler’s observations on participation in *esse* apply *also* to the participation of finite beings in the Infinite Act that is God? The answer appears to be a cautious, “Yes,” for Schindler is attempting to affirm the goodness of creatures as different from God. Creatures must somehow exceed God.

This possible implication chafes against Aquinas’s thought. For Thomas, creatures are perfect precisely by their *likeness* to the divine goodness.⁶¹ Would it not seem, then, that from Thomas’s perspective one cannot affirm that creatures are good insofar as they are different from God? Let us recall the nature of “difference” or, rather, division. Granted, we can and must affirm that creature X is good insofar as it is different from creature Y. We can do so because implicit in the division “X is not Y” is the affirmation of the being of X as a thing (*res*) and of Y as a thing (*res*), together with the alterity that distinguishes them. Thus, X is good as being “not

⁵⁹ Aertsen, 225.

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.50.3 (translation, Benzinger).

⁶¹ “Nothing has the character of the good and desirable, except according as it participates in the likeness of God” (“Nihil habet rationem boni et appetibilis, nisi secundum quod participat Dei similitudinem”). Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.44.4, ad 3. See also *ibid*, resp. and ad 2. This “likeness” can be considered to be twofold, one in the order of existence—every creature imitates God insofar as it is—and one in the order of essence—every creature is an imitation of the divine exemplar (of a divine idea). Thus, a creature is good both by its essence and by its existence, since by each it imitates the divine goodness. This is not, of course, to reify either of these principles of that which is.

Y” not simply and absolutely—for even non-being shares in being “not Y”—but rather because of the determinate being X itself enjoys; it is the distinctiveness of *this* being that is as it were tucked into the goodness of its difference when we say, “X is not Y.”

But if we consider X as not-like God and Y as not-like God, how can we affirm their being good and yet avoid benign Gnosticism? We seem to have stumbled backwards into the excruciating conundrum Schindler noted at the start. We seem to have concluded to the imperfect beginning: a negative evaluation of finite beings, of multitude, and even, by implication, of Christ’s theandric action.

Analogy vs. metaphor: The moment of truth

Schindler’s Argument. Schindler tacitly anticipates the foregoing critique by arguing for the possibility that difference itself is in God. Let us consider the argument in brief. First, Schindler clearly recognizes that all perfections found in creatures must somehow be found in God. This insight is both Thomistic and monotheistic. In Thomistic fashion, Schindler affirms (in a different context) that an effect necessarily has a similarity to its cause (p. 22). The reason Thomas gives is that every agent acts so as to produce its like.⁶² The result is, “In God are the perfections of all things.”⁶³ There is no perfection in an effect not to be found in the cause.⁶⁴ On this point, Thomas and Schindler are simply monotheistic, since for monotheists there cannot be two (or more) ultimate principles of that which is.

Second, implicit in Schindler’s thesis is a differentiation between being “different” from God and—to use a new phrase for clarity’s sake—being “un-like” God. If we could find difference to be in God himself, if God were somehow different from God while remaining one ultimate principle, then a creature’s being different from God would not make the creature un-like God. If not un-like, then not imperfect, then not defective, then not evil. In short, if difference from God were found in God, a creature could be good precisely as being different from God (p. 24). Here, Schindler deftly navigates the distinction between philosophy and theology. Philosophically, he raises an anxious question: may there be difference in the one ultimate principle? Only Christian revelation responds affirmatively.

Effectively, Schindler’s proposal implies an answer to the difficulty I noted previously: It is not that creatures provide something not found in the divine perfection in such a way that there is more than one ultimate principle (Gnosticism), yet it is not that creaturely difference from the divine implies a fall from perfection in such a way that creatures are implicitly evil. A creature’s difference from God, rather than rendering it un-like God, actually manifests God’s being different from God. Both Thomas’s axiom—things are good insofar as they are like God—and also the goodness of difference are paradoxically retained.

⁶² “Ex habitudine effectuum ad causam. Secundum hoc enim effectus procedunt a causa agente, secundum quod praeexistunt in ea: quia omne agens agit sibi simile. Praeexistunt autem effectus in causa secundum modum causae” (ST 1.19.4).

⁶³ “In Deo sunt perfectiones omnium rerum” (ST 1.4.2).

⁶⁴ “Quidquid perfectionis est in effectum, oportet inveniri in causa effectiva” (ST 1.4.2).

Unpacking the Logic. Inherent in the logic is the desire not to allow limitation to be “imperfect” and hence “evil.” That this is the inherent logic is clear from the following. Schindler affirms the goodness of difference as difference. Yet, as discussed above, creaturely difference necessarily imports limitation. “This creature” is “not that creature” because neither of them has being to the fullest extent. Now, if creaturely difference as difference must be wholly good, limitation itself, inherent in creaturely difference, must be good. Schindler affirms this by criticizing an interpretation of participation according to which the participant is:

defined specifically by a lack. Act is infinite and perfect; potency must therefore by imperfect precisely *because of* its limitation and the finitude such a limitation implies. Here we have a straightforward example of what Derrida would have criticized as a simple ‘binary opposition.’ If it is true, we cannot but think of creation as a kind of fall from true perfection (p. 18).

In short, limitation is not imperfection. In his recent book, Schindler eloquently defends this claim. He frankly avows, “We need to ask in what way limitation is itself a perfection.”⁶⁵ As inductive proof of this, he calls to mind that without limitation, one cannot live in accordance with what St. Paul calls the “greatest gift,” love (1 Cor 13:13): “Thus, limitation is part of what enables beings to come together, in freedom and spontaneity, to make room for each other, to dwell within one another—in short, it is the precondition for love and for ... reciprocal self-fulfillment.”⁶⁶

I propose to run the course of this logic a bit further. If limitation is a precondition for the greatest of perfections, must it not also be said of the divine, albeit differently? Since many creaturely perfections are dependent upon limitations, should not these limitations, which free creatures up for perfection, also be said of God, albeit differently? Let us consider the perfection that is motion. For mobile beings, as I have said, motion is perfection, since by it developing beings develop. Yet, motion also inherently involves limitation, for it is the act of something potential insofar as it is yet in potentiality. Now, if motion is not to be a fall from pure perfection, it must somehow be found in God, with the limitation that makes it possible, albeit in a different way. A noteworthy thinker who has made this very suggestion with respect to the Triune relations is Hans Urs von Balthasar: “Something like infinite ‘duration’ and infinite ‘space’ must be attributed to the [Trinitarian] acts of reciprocal love so that the life of the *communio*, of fellowship, can develop.”⁶⁷ This leads to the affirmation that God in his interpersonal triune relations is always “ever greater,” not simply than creaturely understanding of him but, more precisely, ever greater than himself.⁶⁸ Would it not seem that Schindler’s paper supports the logic behind von Balthasar’s contention? He affirms this more explicitly in his book:

⁶⁵ D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 68.

⁶⁶ Schindler, *Dramatic Structure*, 69.

⁶⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, vol. 2, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 257.

⁶⁸ Balthasar, 259.

If we do not equate the divine identity simply with one aspect of created being to the exclusion of what we see as the limitations of finitude, then we are freed to see this “limitation” in a new way. Thus, if the divine identity simply excludes what is meant by polarity in created being, and if God does not lack perfection, then the multiplicity of created being must necessarily be seen as a *fall* from divine identity. But if, on the other hand, divine identity is *more* than the negation of created polarity (plurality), then we are led to ask in what way this polarity, even in its implied limitation, can be an image of the divine identity and therefore in a certain way something positive.⁶⁹

I now turn to my evaluation.

Evaluation. Has the excruciating conundrum satisfactorily been resolved? The chief question that must be asked here is the question of truth: “Is it so?” Can limitation be said of God? The question “Is it true?” belongs to the properly scientific moment of theological discourse. Essential to Thomas’s scientific manner of proceeding is his distinction between things said of God “metaphorically” (improper analogy) and things said of him “analogically” (proper analogy). Things said metaphorically are falsifiable, while things said analogously are not. Technical explication of this distinction is by no means a straightforward matter.⁷⁰ Although an adequate technical account is beyond the scope of this paper, I hope the following brief sketch suffices.

Naming is a function of knowing, for we name as we know.⁷¹ The way we think we name reflects the way we think we know. As is well known, analogous use of a name stands between univocal and purely equivocal uses. Univocal use of a name involves identical accounts of the name in two or more uses: Sam is a man, Dan is a man. If names were said of creatures and of God in univocal fashion, God would be grouped under a genus and would thus be conceived as one among many, a *la* onto-theology. Thomas will have none of that. Purely equivocal use of a name involves totally diverse and unrelated accounts of the name in two or more uses. No valid syllogism follows from purely equivocal naming. Take the following as an example:

A “pole” is a metal rod with two ends.

The former pope was a pole.

Therefore, the former pope was a metal rod with two ends.

⁶⁹ Schindler, *Dramatic Structure*, 68.

⁷⁰ This is so even if we prescind from the insights of literary critics who take a much different approach than does Thomas Aquinas.

⁷¹ For this account of analogy, I am indebted to Ralph McInerny, both as mentor and as author of *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996). Proponents of the “analogy of being,” of which I consider myself one, will only mistakenly critique McInerny’s account as being “purely logical.” His point is that naming is one thing while being is another. He does not dispute that to which people refer as “the analogy of being.” He rather, and accurately, contends that for Thomas patterns of naming are not necessarily identical with relations among beings (see Thomas Aquinas, SCG 1.34, par. 5).

Since no valid syllogism follows from pure equivocation, no knowledge results either.⁷² Therefore, if names could be said of creatures and of God only in purely equivocal ways, we could know nothing at all of God. Although many disagree, Thomas will have nothing of that either, since, he contends, God is known through his effects not simply as the cause without defect but also as the one who really has, in super-eminent fashion, the perfections manifest among creatures.⁷³ Therefore, there must be a way of naming him that falls between univocal and purely equivocal naming: This is analogy. Analogous use of a term involves different but related accounts of the term. Since the accounts are different, they are not univocal but equivocal. Since they are related, they are not purely equivocal.

Now, we must distinguish between analogy and metaphor. Let us first recall that every name signifies a thing under some aspect, just as we know things under certain aspects. I call a man “father,” while my mom calls him “husband” while his employees call him, “boss.” That aspect under which we name something is the “*res significata*,” the thing signified, to be distinguished from the *suppositum* or actual thing for which the name concretely stands in a given utterance.⁷⁴ Attention to the *res significata* is crucial in the distinction between metaphor and analogy. The *res significata* of analogy is pliable enough that it can be signified under different lights (*modi significandi*), yielding different but related meanings. For instance, “healthy” is pliable enough to be signified as accident of dog, as caused by food, and as illustrated by urine. Terms that are not so pliable make fruitful metaphors: He’s a horse! The *res significata* of the term “horse” is (in communal practice) restricted in scope, calling to mind precisely things we call “horse.” Metaphors work by their tension rather than their pliability: the *res significata* is bound up with one thing and as such is implicitly compared to another. There is indeed some similarity that allows the metaphor to work—we get neither laughs nor insight by saying, “Silicon is an Elephant”—yet there is the inherently restricted signifying range of the term that provides the tension.

When it comes to naming God, certainly only certain terms can be used of him and of creatures in analogous ways. A name whose *res significata* imports no imperfection whatsoever can be used to signify God and creatures analogously. Such names are said of God primarily—in terms of their *res significatae*—because all perfections are most perfectly and super-eminently contained in God in simple fashion. A name whose *res significata* is intrinsically bound up with limitation cannot be said of God and creatures analogously.⁷⁵ Of course, every name, being a sign of our knowledge, is inherently limited in terms of its mode of signifying. Nevertheless,

⁷² See Thomas Aquinas, SCG 1.33, par. 4.

⁷³ See Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.12.12 and 1.13.1, 2.

⁷⁴ The *suppositum* in the utterance “father” is a human being who is my father; the *res significata* is the note “male principle of biological being.” Of course, if we are to use “Father” of God analogically, which I would argue revelation bids us do, the note at stake here must be made more precise: “conjoined principle of being in the same nature” (see Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.27.2).

⁷⁵ “Quia enim omnem perfectionem creaturae est in deo invenire sed per alium modum eminentiorem, quaecumque nomina absolute perfectionem absque defectu designant, de deo praedicantur et de aliis rebus: sicut est bonitas, sapientia, esse, et alia huiusmodi. Quodcumque vero nomen huiusmodi perfectiones exprimit cum modo proprio creaturis, de deo dici non potest nisi per similitudinem et metaphoram, per quam quae sunt unius rei alteri solent adaptari, sicut aliquis homo dicitur lapis propter duritiam intellectus” (SCG 1.30, par. 2).

according to Aquinas, some names designate perfections without importing limitation in these designations, *res significatae*, but only in the mode of signifying.

The import of the distinction between metaphor and analogy is profound. Metaphorically grounded propositions are literally falsifiable because the *res significata* is inherently limited. When I hear it said, “God is the lion of Judah,” I indeed gain insight into God and his power, but, in order to sift this insight in the properly scientific moment of theology, I must also say, “God is not a lion, literally speaking.” In contrast, analogical names are said of God “absolutely and affirmatively.”⁷⁶ They cannot be falsified in terms of their *res significatae* but only in terms of their inherently creaturely *modi significandi*. It was failure to distinguish metaphor and analogy that kept at bay the conversion of Augustine of Hippo, for he was greatly troubled by God’s walking in the garden and by bodily man’s being in the divine image. Augustine could not be false to his God-given intelligence.⁷⁷ Since the very truth of theological propositions is at stake in the distinction between metaphorical and analogous utterances, it is crucial for theology to undergo the excruciating question, “Is it so?” But, by what criteria is one to make this judgment?

One source of criteria is reason. We can legitimately appeal to reason if faith and reason are a) not to involve “two truths” and b) not to involve contradiction. Reason, then, can assist us in interpreting Scriptural, liturgical, traditional, and theological statements about God.⁷⁸ Let us examine, however briefly, God’s mutability as a relevant test case. The systematic theologian encounters God’s “repentance” throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 6:6), just as Augustine encountered God’s bodily walking. Repentance involves change. But change or motion is the act of something potential insofar as it is potential. Change thus implies the following: subject of change (whether substance or prime matter), really distinguishable perfection (substantial or accidental form), composition of subject and perfection-being-acquired, relative imperfection of the subject, and real succession (before and after).

Now, can we affirm that God is composed of subject and accident (or worse, prime matter and ever-newly acquired substantial form)?⁷⁹ Can we affirm that God is on the way to

⁷⁶ “Absolute et affirmative de Deo dicuntur” (Thomas Aquinas, ST 1.13.2).

⁷⁷ The force of both metaphor and analogy presupposes the similarity of creatures to God. However, in the former case, the name signifies a necessarily restricted scope of being. In the latter case, names do not contain any inherently restricting implication. Because similarity is present in both cases, describing analogy as “similarity within a greater difference” is insufficient to distinguish these modes of discourse. Lateran IV’s teaching that every similarity is exceeded by an ever-greater dissimilarity remains true for both accounts and cannot help us distinguish these modes of discourse.

⁷⁸ See Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), esp. 78–85. Gilson’s narration (on the pages that follow) of the increasing skepticism that followed in the wake of Franciscan victories makes one wonder whether the contemporary refusal of philosophy (and necessary arguments) to propose preambles for the faith—for that, it is said, would shackle God, and who could bend the knee to the *Primum Movens*?—is leading to a similar nominalism.

⁷⁹ All composed beings are greater than the sum of their parts. In composed things, one part may be active while another is passive. Thus, some composed beings can “move themselves” through their active part. But the active part cannot be the cause of the whole, since the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Now, no caused thing can be cause of itself. Therefore, all composed beings are caused by some other. If God is composed, he is caused. Again, no composed being is identifiable with its parts. Therefore, were God composed, he would not be identifiable with part of him. Would this part, then, be not adorable?

some actuality? Can we situate him within the eschatological “not yet” under which we groan? Who is willing to swallow these implications? But if no one, then, has arrived at an adequate definition of motion that also avoids these implications, so that motion can be said analogously of God, is its *res significata* being freed from limitation? It would seem, however, that Schindler is not moved by these questions, for he presses the matter further.

Participation within the Trinity?

Turning his attention to the structure of participation as such, Schindler concludes with a radical proposal. The Son participates in the Father:

It is this trinitarian mystery that finally justifies the infinite variety of structures of participation within the created order, for here we have an Other, the Son, who participates, so to speak, in the Father’s being, not at all as a defective copy, but as Perfect Image, and thus as an Other to the Father who, as “not” the Father and in this sense as *more* than just the Father alone, is by that very token also perfectly equal to Him, an expression not of himself but of the Father’s love. Participation, and the difference that lies within it, thus becomes not *simply* a figure of created being in opposition to the first principle but the very reality of the first principle itself. In other words, participation, being an image and therefore not one’s own source, is no longer simply that which marks the difference between the creature and God, as it necessarily seems to in religions and philosophies outside of trinitarian Christianity, because now God, too, “participates” in God: the Son and Spirit “share” in God’s being! (26f).

The argument runs thus. The predicate “to participate” must be said of all that participate in goodness. If “to participate” implied imperfection, creaturely participants would necessarily lack goodness insofar as they were not identifiable with the Good. This is not tolerable. Therefore, “to participate” does not imply imperfection as a fall. Indeed, participation is a perfection; it has its own positivity as such. But if it has its own positivity, surely it has this only from the ultimate, transcendent source of all positivity, God. Therefore, in God is to be found “participation.” My question is, does this conclusion lead to the following two dilemmas?

First dilemma. On the one hand, can we meaningfully affirm “participation” of the Son? First, let us specify the meaning of the term “participation.” I suggest the following: having in limited fashion some perfection from another, to which it properly belongs. Implicit constituents of participation are the following: alterity of participant and participated, derivation of perfection from the participated, the participant’s limited enjoyment of the perfection, and some real composition in the participant. Now, if we accept this as the meaning of participation, we can apply the term analogously of several different types of participation, each of which designates its referent via this note (*res significata*)—albeit differently (with different *modi significandi*).⁸⁰ One example is material substances participating in perfections properly belonging to other material substances: The iron participates in the heat of the fire, the moon in the light of the sun,

⁸⁰ Note that mode of signifying does not merely play a part in differentiating the way in which the *res significata* is enjoyed; it also “comes along with” signification, even in unintended ways, as, e.g., when one says “God has goodness” the mode of signifying imports substance-accident composition, which has no place in God.

the saw in the builder's labor, etc. Another example is intelligent beings participating in the light of divine truth. Yet another example is holy creatures participating in divine sanctity. Each of these is an example of substance-accident participation. Nevertheless, quite different kinds of having are involved. Since in each case the mode of "having" and the perfections had differ, so do our modes of signifying them. Still, we designate each of the participants under the note "having limitedly some perfection from another to which it properly belongs." This note is pliable enough to cover a range of phenomena that exhibit the note differently, so that we have an analogous extension of the term "participation." Philosophers venture forth to stranger terrain, shedding light on what must be the case by employing analogy. Every created being, metaphysics concludes, is not identical with its own *esse* but participates in *esse*. Although we have ventured forth quite far, we still find the note with which we began: having limitedly some perfection from another to which it properly belongs. Now, if we cease to designate things under this note, do we not risk falling into an uninformative equivocation?

My question is, How is Schindler applying the term "participation" to the Son? If he is to retain analogy, he ought to retain in his predication the note by which things said to participate are signified. This note connotes alterity, derivation, limitation, and composition. Clearly, the Son is other than the Father. Clearly, too, the Son derives his subsistence from the Father. However, can one affirm that the Son is limited or that the Son is composed? Schindler would certainly agree, with Athanasius *contra mundum*, that the Son is not "less" than God the Father. But Thomas insists that we must say even more: for Thomas, each person is the *whole* God! There is no real distinction whatsoever between any hypostasis and the divine being. The distinction is purely notional, as Thomas contends.⁸¹ I would add that this contention is also a matter of faith.⁸² Now, if we employ the term participation to signify "having limitedly some perfection from another, to which it properly belongs" how can we avoid subordinationism?

A related question is, How we can avoid importing some kind of composition into the person participating, some kind of differentiation between the being he receives and the person receiving? Perhaps suggestive of such a differentiation is the following citation from Schindler's paper: "Though there is an identity between the divine nature and the hypostases, they are at the same time not simply the same" (p. 25, underscore mine). What are the terms of the "they" that

⁸¹ "Sic igitur ex ea parte qua relatio in rebus creatis habet esse accidentale in subiecto, relatio realiter existens in Deo habet esse essentiae divinae, idem omnino ei existens" (ST 1.28.2, underscore mine).

⁸² I would draw attention to two ecclesial statements, by no means isolated expressions. First, the 11th Council of Toledo teaches: "Therefore, we confess (*confitemur*) and believe (*creditur*) that, taken singly, each person is the whole God and that all three persons are one God. In them there is one, undivided and equal deity, majesty or power; it is neither reduced in any one singly nor increased in the three..." ("Singulariter ergo, et unaquaeque persona plenus Deus et totae tres personae unus Deus confitemur [*sic!*] et creditur: una illis vel indivisa atque aequalis Deitas, maiestas sive potestas, nec minoratur in singulis, nec augetur in tribus" [DS 529 {279}]). This synod, which took place in the year 675, has produced the Magisterium's single best scientific "treatise" on the Triune God. The CCC cites this synod as authoritative, even though it is not an ecumenical council.

Second, in its Decree for the Jacobites, the Ecumenical Council of Florence stated: "These three persons are one God and not three gods. The reason is that there is one substance of the three, one essence, one nature, one divinity, one immensity, one eternity, and all things are one where the opposition of relation does not impose itself" ("Hae tres personae sunt unus Deus, et non tres dii: quia trium est una substantia, una essentia, una natura, una divinitas, una immensitas, una aeternitas, omniaque sunt unum, ubi non obviat relationis opposition" [DS 1330 {703}]).

are being differentiated here? One wants to read here “Father” as differentiated from “Son,” etc. However, if that is the case, why the wording “not simply the same”? Father and Son are, according to Thomas, relatively opposed subsisting relations. They are wholly other. Schindler agrees with Thomas emphatically here. So, the wording “not simply the same” appears quite understated. For this reason, I am not certain that he would deny any implication of another differentiation at stake here. I wonder whether he also somehow really differentiates the Father from the divine being and the Son from the divine being. Such a differentiation seems to be the purport of the following text from his book: “As Siewerth describes it, the ultimate difference in God is between Being and Subsistence, or Being and Persons.” Schindler continues, “The mystery of the Trinity is the mystery of the relation between Being (Substance) and Persons (Hypostases).”⁸³ Composition in the Son and differentiation between hypostasis and divine being appear to me to be problematic. Both of these appear to be included ineluctably as things signified when we say, “The Son participates in the Father.”

On the other hand, if we attempt to evade the foregoing, does not the initial, excruciating conundrum come back to haunt us? Let us suppose that we can preserve the analogy of participation, and thus clarity of meaning, by eliminating those two troublesome notes, limitation and composition. We are left with derivation and alterity. Let derivation and alterity be what we mean by “participation.” Now that we have eliminated the two troublesome notes, we ought to face the question of the difference of a creature’s participation from that of the Son. Let us ask, “What accounts for every creature’s inherently limited reception of being?” To answer, we cannot appeal to our new rendering of “participation.” But, if “not participation,” then something else. Let us call it Q. Q accounts for the limited reception of being and implies real composition. Now, a difficulty arises. If Q differentiates between a creature’s reception of being and the Son’s reception of being, then Q is predicable only of creatures. If Q is predicable only of creatures, then Q inherently implies limitation with respect to the first principle. We find no “Q” in the triune godhead, the ultimate principle. Therefore, Q—that which establishes the difference of creatures from the Son—is imperfect. Since imperfect, therefore defective, therefore evil. The initial conundrum comes home to roost. I turn now to the one last dilemma.

Second dilemma. How does the creature, precisely as different from the Triune Creator, have its “excess” vis-à-vis its Trinitarian Creator? In order to pursue this question, I must lay aside the first dilemma. Let us presume, then, that it is possible to speak analogically of “participation” of the Son and of creatures, without a) the problematic implications of restriction and composition and without b) the avoidance of the regrettable return of the initial conundrum. I ask, whence comes the creaturely excess?

On the one hand, if the creature has its excess, its difference, not from the Trinitarian Creator, then not all perfections are traced back to the ultimate principle. We seem to end in a benign Gnosticism. But this is fatuous.

⁸³ Schindler, *Dramatic Structure*, 72.

On the other hand, we can avoid Gnosticism by affirming that the creature's difference from God lies somehow "within" the difference found in God. In this way, the creature offers nothing that it has not received; yet, since God is different from God, the creature, too, can be different from God without thereby being imperfect. The creature derives its finite difference from God from the infinite difference of God from God, Light from Light. The problem, as I see it, is this: In suggesting that the creature derives its difference from the Trinitarian difference, in suggesting that the creature lies "within" the Trinitarian difference, are we not implying that the creature is a "mere participation" a "merely partial" manifestation of the Trinitarian difference? But if a merely partial manifestation, then the creature does not really contribute an excess not always already to be found in God. The creature still is "not" the Triune unity-in-difference in a sense that makes the creature imperfect. But, if imperfect, then evil. Are we not left with the excruciating dilemma with which we began: creaturely difference makes no difference?

Conclusion

I am not certain that there is a consistent way out of these dilemmas. Still, Schindler's quest to find some way to articulate the goodness of creatures as creatures is wholly praiseworthy. I think we can fire back to Feuerbach and to others who rightly criticize what they wrongly mistake to be Christian. No creature is goodness itself, yet creatures are admitted into real albeit partial shares of the divine goodness. At the end of our labors, though we—feeling Paul's anguish and falling silent about things we thought we once knew—may protest, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk 17:10), yet another may say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21). What's the difference? Even if making creatures makes no difference in God, it surely makes for creatures all the difference in the world.