

# Why the *Imago Dei* is in the Intellect Alone: A Criticism of a Phenomenology of Sensible Experience for Attaining an Image of God<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper, as a response to Mark K. Spencer's, "Perceiving the Image of God in the Whole Human Person" in the present volume, argues in defence of Aquinas's position that the Imago Dei is limited in the human being to the rational, intellective soul alone. While the author agrees with Spencer that the hierarchical relation between body and soul in the human composite must be maintained while avoiding the various permeations of dualism, nevertheless, the Imago Dei cannot be located in the human body or the principle of the body considered within the body/soul composite without betraying a number of fundamental Thomistic metaphysical principles. Essential to these includes Aquinas's position that an image of God should image not only the Divine Nature, but also the Trinitarian relations between the Divine Persons. Further, the paper also argues that a phenomenology of sense experience could not, on principle, attain to an image of God in the whole human person within a Thomistic framework generally.*

## Introduction

There are two positions one does not want to be in when responding to a learned paper in an academic colloquium. In an episode of Rowan Atkinson's *Blackadder III*, Hugh Laurie's foppish Prince George rehearses aloud a juvenile and salacious poem he has composed for a woman whom he is courting. At the poem's rather naughty conclusion, Blackadder responds, "It's very moving sir. Would you mind if I change one tiny aspect of it?" "Which one?" "The words." Thankfully, I'm not in this position here today, for if I were, in the very least I would likely be wrong. However, on the other end, absolute amity is neither very interesting nor productive of stimulating discussion.

I believe that I have landed somewhere in between these extremes. I agree with Dr. Spencer about what he wishes to avoid: the philosophical conundrums raised by sundry dualisms, anti-cosmic assessments of the body, and muddled renditions of hylomorphism. Also, I affirm what Dr. Spencer desires to preserve: the hierarchical relation between soul and body, and the fundamental doctrines underlying the Augustinian/Thomistic understanding of the *imago dei*, which Dr. Spencer seeks merely to emend. Most importantly, I agree that a philosophy must correspond to one's experience.<sup>2</sup>

However, while I generally wonder whether a phenomenology of sensible experience is

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Susan Gabriel for her helpful and insightful comments, reflections, and corrections to an earlier version of this article. Any remaining errors and problems are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Spencer writes, ". . . careful accounts of experience ought to constrain anthropology: if some experience cannot fit with a given anthropology, then the latter requires amendment." Mark K. Spencer, "Perceiving the Image of God in the Whole Human Person," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 13.2 (Spring 2018) 1-18, at 11.

ever universally convincing when marshalled toward any cause, in the case of the image of God in the human being, I find the philosophical method problematic on principle. The more I think it through, the more I am convinced that Augustine and Thomas are correct: the image of God, present in the human soul, cannot be also in the body, or the human person considered as a hylomorphic substance.<sup>3</sup> I believe that Dr. Spencer's emendation, and the phenomenological methods used to achieve it, betray a number of fundamental philosophical and theological positions of Aquinas, upon which he builds his understanding of the image of God: must one part ways with Thomas on more deeply rooted doctrines in order to incorporate the image of God into the body?

I have no qualms with what Dr. Spencer claims about Augustine and Aquinas themselves, and because most of his explanation of the position is grounded explicitly in Aquinas, I will follow suit. However, I raise a number of theses here that I wish to defend in the following against the claim that there is an image of God in the body:

- 1) the perfection of the universe requires that the soul of the human being (between the angel and brute on the cosmic hierarchy) is at once a material form and a separable substance;
- 2) seeing the image of God in the body of the human tends either to a) reduce the eminence of the angelic nature relative to the human and brute, b) reduce the eminence of the human nature relative to the brute or to the community, c) elevate the eminence of the brutes to equality with human beings, or d) flirt with a flat ontology counter to Augustine's and Aquinas's stratified hierarchies of reality;
- 3) the emendation of Thomas's image of God runs counter to some of Thomas's deeper metaphysical and theological commitments;
- 4) an image of God should image not only the Divine Nature, but also the Trinitarian relations between the Divine Persons;
- 5) a phenomenology of sensible experience cannot, and, perhaps on principle could not, yield an image of God; and
- 6) the emendation of Thomas's image of God seems to re-create a kind of problematic Cartesianism which Spencer explicitly warns against.

I agree with Augustine and Aquinas: the image of God is in the rational soul alone, and, as Dr. Spencer puts it: "The best we can do on the Thomistic view is to perceive a likeness or sign of the image of God in the body."<sup>4</sup> Not too shabby, in the end. I'm rather content with this limitation, and in the following, I'll explain why.

### **Image, Likeness, and the Hierarchy of Being**

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<sup>3</sup> The image of God is in the hylomorphic human substance only insofar as the human soul is also rational, that is, a separable, substantial form.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 10.

Dr. Spencer explains very well Thomas's position that the image of God is in the rational soul alone. We need not rehearse this in detail, but I will emphasise a few points.<sup>5</sup> Thomas argues, with Augustine, that any image (*imago*) implies a likeness (*similitudo*), but not every likeness is an image.<sup>6</sup> That is, a thing can be like another without being its image: a red door and a blushing bride are similar in hue, but one is hardly an image of the other because of it. All images, however, possess a likeness to that of which they are images. Likeness is the bigger thing, and, as Aquinas asserts, is essential to an image: there are no images without likeness. The notion of image "adds something" to likeness, namely, that it is "produced as an imitation of something else."<sup>7</sup>

Thomas further specifies that i) not every effect is an image of its cause, and ii) an accidental likeness between things does not an image make.<sup>8</sup> To be an image, Thomas contends, there must be a likeness in species. Because, as Thomas maintains, "specific likeness follows the ultimate difference," . . . "it is clear, therefore, that intellectual creatures alone, properly speaking, are made to God's image."<sup>9</sup> His reasoning is as follows: all things share a likeness to God insofar as they exist. Some share a further likeness insofar as they also live, and some of those living things also sense.<sup>10</sup> But existing, living, and sensing are not the ultimate differentia in the definition of the human species; that is, the human being is a *rational* animal. Because God possesses intellect and will, those powers that differentiate the human (and angelic) being from all other creatures, the human shares this closer likeness to God by her intelligence.<sup>11</sup> Although lower creatures lack intellect, they possess a trace of the divine mind that created them – a footprint (*vestigia*), or likeness as to a trace.<sup>12</sup>

If an image requires a likeness in species, and this likeness follows the ultimate difference, then one sees why the image of God (the likeness to God in the human according to species) must be restricted to the rational nature alone.<sup>13</sup> Further, Aquinas maintains, following Aristotle, that the power of the intellect is not contained in a bodily organ. Unlike the corporeal and internal senses, it is not limited by material confines. Certainly it requires the senses for the material with which it works, but properly speaking, the intellect is immaterial. For this reason,

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<sup>5</sup> We certainly need not accept Thomas's definitions of image and likeness, but his definitions supply the context within which we are speaking about the *imago dei*, and the emendation that Dr. Spencer offers is also working within these notions.

<sup>6</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A1. co. Thomas also quotes Augustine's *div. qu.* 74. I use the text in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc., 1948).

<sup>7</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A1. co.: "... *agitur ad imitationem alterius*." Further, equality, unless the image is a perfect image, does not belong to the essence of an image.

<sup>8</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A2. co.

<sup>9</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A2. co.

<sup>10</sup> Aquinas here follows Aristotle's ground-up hierarchy. For Aristotle, however, (unmoved movers aside) the higher is never found without the lower; Aquinas's angelology requires him to emend Aristotle's position.

<sup>11</sup> This likeness in the human being is, of course, imperfect. Only Christ possesses a perfect likeness of the Father, by which identity Christ is called the perfect image of God, or just the Image of God: he lacks nothing possessed by the Father. See *ST* Ia. Q93. A1. ad. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A2. ad. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas writes, "Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature" (*ST* Ia. Q93. A4. co).

the image of God can be found only in subsistent forms. Thus, the only creatures that image God in this precise, Thomistic sense, are human beings, angels, and, one supposes, demons. As Spencer points out and explains, the soul of the human being is at once the material form of the human hylomorphic composite, and a subsistent form, “capable of existing and acting intellectually and volitionally apart from matter, though it is naturally meant to actualize matter, and is in an unnatural condition without it.”<sup>14</sup> As Charles Hart explains the separation of the human soul,

Man, in a word, is truly a rational animal. His soul, or active principle, should evidently be something more than simply the form of the body, as is the case in all the material substances below man. If the human form or soul in these higher activities displays a certain intrinsic independence of the body, then it should in some sense be an independent substance even if also the form of the body as the lower activities would indicate. Independent action would logically demand a truly independent substance as its source.<sup>15</sup>

The human soul is an independent substance on its own, and is not just a co-principle of a hylomorphic substance (though it is also this).<sup>16</sup>

All other material forms, (the forms of non-human matter/form, body/soul composites) do not image God because they do not possess intellect, that is, the species likeness following from the ultimate difference: ‘rational.’ They are neither willing nor intelligising substances. Already one sees here that if the intellect *were* bodily, that is, if intellect and will were contained in a material organ, then the body of a hylomorphic substance, suited materially to actualise these powers, could be, potentially, an image of God. Aquinas maintains, however, that this could not be: the very material limitations that allow an eye to see the violin preclude it from hearing its music; the very organisation of the ear that allows it to hear the “Four Seasons,” prevent it from seeing Vivaldi playing it. The intellect, however, can think all things, and thus, on principle, cannot be limited to a material organ. And so, for Aquinas, the subsistent, intellectual form alone is the image of God. To have it any other way, either the intellect must somehow be bodily, or there must be some other image of God in the human being other than the intellect residing in the body, and, unless one wishes to extend the image of God to the brutes, it must exist in the *human* body alone.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mark K. Spencer, “What Is It Like to Be an Embodied Person? What Is It Like to Be a Separated Soul?,” *Angelicum* 93 (2016): 219-246, at 219.

<sup>15</sup> Charles A. Hart, *Thomistic Metaphysics: An Inquiry Into the Act of Existing*, Reprint of the 1957 edition (United Kingdom: editiones scholasticae, 2015), 150. Also, according to Hart, “Evidently Aristotle is unwilling to make any fundamental modification of this hylomorphism to meet the fact of man’s two contrary types of activities, despite his own clear recognition of their decided difference” (150).

<sup>16</sup> See Hart: “A substantial form can also be a whole substance, and it is not necessarily limited to being a mere principle of a substance ... Substantiality need not be limited to purely material or corporeal substances” (151).

<sup>17</sup> Hart explains that for Aquinas, “In the lower orders, form is completely dependent on matter for action and therefore for existence. Therefore, such a material form loses its independent substantial character and is reduced to the role of formal principle only of such a composite substance, of which matter is the other principle. Its dependence on matter is complete. By contrast, the soul in man is an incorporeal substance in itself and also the

To argue otherwise would collapse a fundamental piece of scaffolding undergirding Thomas's cosmology, namely, the view that the perfection of the universe requires that the soul of the human being (between the angel and brute on the cosmic hierarchy) is at once a material form and a separable substance. The "perfection of the universe" (*perfectionem universi*) is a phrase repeated by Aquinas throughout his works, and regularly summoned forth as a necessary truth according to which other hypotheses are proven right or wrong. In Question 47 of the *Prima Pars*, Aquinas writes, ". . . as the divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction of things for the sake of the perfection of the universe, so is it the cause of inequality. For the universe would not be perfect if only one grade of goodness were found in things."<sup>18</sup> Aquinas uses this principle to argue that one should expect a flourishing fullness of variation of Being throughout the universe created by an infinitely powerful and perfect God. A universe that contains lesser things in addition to greater things is ultimately greater than a universe that contained just the greater things alone.<sup>19</sup> The hierarchical order of Being suffers no break, as it extends from God at its apex to the shadows of ants at its nadir, because, Aquinas writes: "the perfection of the universe required various grades of being."<sup>20</sup> Arthur Lovejoy called this doctrine the "principle of plenitude" in his monumental, *The Great Chain of Being*.<sup>21</sup> Fran O'Rourke has dubbed it "creative diffusion." Under whatever name, the principle is the same: as John Dillon put it: "the world does not tolerate a gap."<sup>22</sup>

Although there are many sources from which Aquinas could have received this doctrine, he no doubt sees it in a fully developed form in Dionysius, Aquinas's go-to philosophical source on the existence and nature of angels, though it is already present in Augustine's Neoplatonised cosmic schemata.<sup>23</sup> Because the universe has its origin in a God with intellect and will, so too must there be creatures that possess some measure of the same, and perfect themselves and return to God by these very powers. Aquinas argues that, even though human beings possess such powers, there must also be separated substances, that is, substances without bodies, who

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form of the body" (153).

<sup>18</sup> *ST* Ia. Q47. A2. co.

<sup>19</sup> As Pope Francis explains in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, "The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety 'come from the intention of the first agent' who willed that 'what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another' inasmuch as God's goodness 'could not be represented fittingly by any one creature'" (*Laudato Si'* 86). See Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, accessed 20 May, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

<sup>20</sup> *ST* Ia. Q89. A1. co.

<sup>21</sup> See also Fran O'Rourke: "According to Aquinas, commenting on Dionysius, the universe would not be complete if there were but one grade of goodness in beings, i.e., if they were all equal. Diversity and gradation among beings belongs to the perfection of the universe." Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), at 262.

<sup>22</sup> John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), at 317.

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas explicitly invokes this "principle of plenitude," which claims that the "perfection of the universe" requires every possible grade of Being in a world brought into being and sustained by God, in question 50 of the *Prima Pars* to argue for the existence of separated intelligences.

also possess these—otherwise, there would be a gap in the ladder of being extending from God to the material world. Disembodied intelligences fill this gap; like God, they possess intellect and will and are immaterial. Here, Aquinas parts ways with Augustine, who believed that angels and demons possess bodies of aether or fire and air, respectively.

Chesterton said that the reason why Aquinas was so interested in angels was because he was more interested in man. One sees here why Aquinas characterises the human soul as he does, as both a separable intelligence and a *forma corporis*. If humans were simply like other animals, whose souls are material forms only, this would create another *chorismos* in the cosmos—a gap between the angels and animals. The human being, therefore, fills this gap, possessing a soul that is at once a separable intelligence similar to the angel, but also the form of a body like that of the brutes.<sup>24</sup> That the human being fulfills both sides is necessary for the perfection of the universe. Hart explains,

Thus the unity of the composite human substance is far higher than that of any living substance below it. Because the human soul is incorporeal and subsistent, the human substance approaches, without of course reaching, the unity of a simple spiritual substance.<sup>25</sup>

Now consider the human being as an image of God. Yes, the body of the human must be a particular kind of body to perform the kinds of acts that are particularly human acts, as Aristotle claims: we need a human brain, among other things. But our exterior and interior senses differ from those of other animals merely in degree. In fact, as Augustine often observes, in numerous respects, many lower animals possess far superior bodies than do human beings, but we do not consider them more valuable because of them: “What human being can equal the eagle and the vulture in the sense of sight? Or the dog in the sense of smell? Or the hare, the stag, and all the birds in speed? Or the lion and the elephant in strength? Who can equal the longevity of the serpent, which is said to shed old age with its skin and return to its youth?”<sup>26</sup> There is nothing particular about the body *qua* body which necessarily sets the human being apart as an image of God, or even at all, in Augustine’s view—indeed, the demons, according to Augustine, possess bodies far superior to our fleshy forms.

However, because the intellect and will of the rational soul require no organ, these particular powers are different *in kind* from those shared by merely ensouled bodies (material forms). In fact, because the image of God is found in the intellect alone, Aquinas claims that the angel possesses this image to a greater extent than does the human, owing to the superiority of the angelic intellect.<sup>27</sup> The image of God, therefore, for Thomas, is restricted to only those beings

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<sup>24</sup> This is why the definition of the human as a rational animal brings together both sides of the human being’s nature.

<sup>25</sup> Hart, 159.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *civ. Dei* 8.15. I use the text in Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. William Babcock (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas writes, “the image of God is more perfect in the angels than in man, because their intellectual nature is

that possess intellect: angels and demons (subsistent forms) and human beings, whose souls, as both subsistent forms (like angels and demons) and material forms (like those of other animals and plants), straddle both levels of the cosmic hierarchy (the animal and the angelic). Every level of the created hierarchy is a hinge between what is above and below. The problem that Aquinas notes here, and I don't see how he can be wrong, is that were the image of God extended to the human body *qua* body, or to the human hylomorphic supposit, it would have to be demonstrated what is particular about the *human* body, to the exclusion of other animal bodies, such that it is such an image.

Hart says that Aquinas's emendation of Aristotle's hylomorphism might "[a]t first sight . . . seem to be a confused mixture of Platonism and Aristotelianism, with the soul's incorporeal substance note obviously borrowed from Plato and its substantial form aspect from Aristotle."<sup>28</sup> Or one can see the particular human nature as necessarily filling an otherwise gap within the hierarchy of being, between the non-intelligent animal nature and the angelic nature. It seems to me that locating the image of God in the body either i) reduces the human nature to that of the brutes, whereby the image of God is no longer the particular claim of the rational nature, or ii) denigrates the nature of the disembodied angels. The diversity and variation of the hierarchy of being is a fundamental metaphysical Neoplatonic (and essentially Dionysian) principle at the heart of Augustine's and Thomas's cosmologies and upon which many of their positions are structured.<sup>29</sup> Spencer is keen to maintain the hierarchical relation between soul and body, but seeking to find the image of God in the body seems to threaten the hierarchy between creatures themselves.<sup>30</sup>

### **An Image of the Uncreated Trinity**

Thomas makes a further claim that will be problematic for certain candidates for the title of "image of God," particularly those nominated by a phenomenology of sensible experience.

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more perfect . . ." (*ST* Ia. Q93. A3. co.). As Dr. Spencer notes, Aquinas does speak in this Article of a kind of image of God in the human being in virtue of her body, lacking in the angel, namely, that i) man proceeds from man as God proceeds from God, ii) the whole human soul is in the whole human body and God from God, iii) the whole human soul is in every part of the body as God is in the whole world. See Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 6-9. For the distinction between "trace" and "image," see *ST* Ia. Q93. A6. co. However, these likenesses amount to only a trace, that is, a representation of something by way of an effect that does not attain to the likeness of the species. Dr. Spencer summarises: "These secondary images of God have a good deal to do with the body, but Aquinas insists that in each case, the image of God is, strictly speaking, in our soul—perhaps the soul in relation to the body, but not in the body as such. The human body, like all physical things, just bears the 'trace' (*vestigium*) or 'likeness' of God" (Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 9).

<sup>28</sup> Hart, 153.

<sup>29</sup> This is one point in defence of my 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> theses above: 2) Seeing the image of God in the body of the human tends either to i) reduce the eminence of the angelic nature relative to the human and brute, ii) reduce the eminence of the human nature relative to the brute or to the community, iii) elevate the eminence of the brutes to equality with human beings, or iv) yield a flat ontology, and 3) The emendation of Thomas's image of God runs counter to some of Thomas's deeper metaphysical and theological commitments.

<sup>30</sup> Spencer writes, "The second [problematic anthropology] is any personalism on which the image of God is in the whole person to the exclusion of any hierarchy between soul and body; this fails to grasp how the person is given as a hierarchical unity" ("Perceiving the Image," 3).

Aquinas writes (*ST Ia. Q93. A5. co*),

. . . to be to the image of God by imitation of the Divine Nature does not exclude being to the same image by the representation of the Divine Persons: but rather one follows from the other. We must, therefore, say that in man there exists the image of God, both as regards the Divine Nature and as regards the Trinity of Persons; for also in God Himself there is one Nature in Three Persons.

So far, Thomas has discussed the rational creature's likeness to God insofar as she imitates God in being (like the First Being), life (like the First Life), and intelligence (like the Supreme Wisdom).<sup>31</sup> Now he adds that the Divine Nature includes the Trinity of Persons, and so an image of God must also be a species likeness to the relations that constitute the uncreated Trinity. To grasp what exactly must be imaged in an image of God, therefore, one must first discern how Aquinas understands the processions of and relations between the Divine Persons.

In Question 27, Article 1 of the *Prima Pars*, Aquinas rejects two different and opposed interpretations of "procession" within God. The first is the error of Arius, who claimed that the Son is the effect, or Primary creature, of the Father, and that the Holy Ghost is a creature fashioned by both: the three are really distinct beings. The second is the error of Sebellius, who maintained that the Son is really the Father assuming Flesh, and the Holy Ghost is the Father "sanctifying the rational creature, and moving it to life." That is, the Father impresses His likeness upon some already existing thing. In the first instance, procession is a movement from cause to external effect. In the second, procession is the action of a cause altering its effect, "or impressing its own likeness on it." While both interpretations, according to Aquinas, contradict Scripture, there are the further problems that under the Arian interpretation, it is hard to say how the Son and Holy Ghost are also God, and under the Sebellian, the three are actually identified. Here is how Aquinas characterises the problems:

Careful examination shows that both of these opinions take procession as meaning an outward act; hence neither of them affirms procession as existing in God Himself; whereas, since procession always supposes action, and as there is an outward procession corresponding to the act of tending to external matter, so there must be an inward procession corresponding to the act remaining within the agent.<sup>32</sup>

The inadequate conceptions of procession within God fail insofar as each procession results in

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<sup>31</sup> See also Augustine, *Trin.* 10.13 ff. I use the text in Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> *ST Ia. Q27. A1. Co.* "Si quis autem diligenter consideret, uterque accepit processionem secundum quod est ad aliquid extra, unde neuter posuit processionem in ipso Deo. Sed, cum omnis processio sit secundum aliquam actionem, sicut secundum actionem quae tendit in exteriorem materiam, est aliqua processio ad extra; ita secundum actionem quae manet in ipso agente, attenditur processio quaedam ad intra." For the Latin texts of Augustine, throughout I use, Saint Augustine, *Opera Omnia – Corpus Augustinianum Gissense, Electronic Edition* (Charlottesville, Virginia: InteLex Corporation, 2000).

something external to the originator of the procession—a distinct being or outward effect.

For Aquinas, there is something essentially *internal* about the processions that occur within the Trinity, which can be properly imaged only by the intellect. When one understands something, Aquinas explains, the concept proceeds from one's knowledge of the object. The known issues forth from the very power of the knower and is contained within it, distinct, but not separated, which is why Augustine can advise: "Let the mind then not go looking for itself as if it were absent, but rather take pains to tell itself apart as present."<sup>33</sup> The bodily senses are not like this. The object seen is separate from and external to both the eye that sees it and the vision that unites them.<sup>34</sup> That is, bodily sensation requires external bodies to complete its actions.<sup>35</sup> The intellect, however, knows itself, and can be an object of its own consideration. Its knowledge proceeds (although in this life with the aid of phantasms), from its own powers.<sup>36</sup>

In Question 27, Aquinas focuses on this particular character of the intellect when explaining procession within God. He writes,

As God is above all things, we should understand what is said of God, not according to the mode of the lowest creatures, namely bodies, but from the similitude of the highest creatures, the intellectual substances; while even the similitudes derived from these fall short in the representation of divine objects.<sup>37</sup> Procession, therefore, is not to be understood from what it is in bodies. . . . Rather it is to be understood by way of an intelligible emanation, for example, of the intelligible word which proceeds from the speaker, yet remains in him. In that sense the Catholic Faith understands procession as existing in God.<sup>38</sup>

When explaining the processions of the Son from the Father, and the Holy Ghost from the Father and Son, Aquinas emphasizes again that "procession exists in God, only according to an action

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *Trin.* 10.12.

<sup>34</sup> Augustine writes, "Nor is it [the mind knowing itself] like a man being told 'Look at your face,' which he can only do in a mirror; even our own face is absent from our sight, because it is not in a place our sight can be directed at. But when the mind is told *Know thyself*, it knows itself the very moment it understands what 'thyself' is, and for no other reason than that it is present to itself" (*Trin.* 10.12).

<sup>35</sup> Touch, one might argue, is somehow more akin to the intellect: when I feel my arm, my body is both that which feels and that which is felt, but again, there is a spatial, external distinction between my fingers and my arm; a fingertip cannot touch itself.

<sup>36</sup> This is why Aristotle goes so far as to say that the mind, when in act, is nothing other than the forms it presently conceives.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas recognises the danger that Montague Brown raises of thinking that, because the image of God is in the intellect, therefore, God's knowing is the same as human knowing. See Montague Brown, "Imago Dei in Thomas Aquinas," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 10.1 (Fall 2014): 1-11, at 8.

<sup>38</sup> *ST Ia. Q27. A1. Co.* "Cum autem Deus sit super omnia, ea quae in Deo dicuntur, non sunt intelligenda secundum modum infimarum creaturarum, quae sunt corpora; sed secundum similitudinem supremarum creaturarum, quae sunt intellectuales substantiae; a quibus etiam similitudo accepta deficit a repraesentatione divinorum. Non ergo accipienda est processio secundum quod est in corporalibus, vel per motum localem, vel per actionem alicuius causae in exteriorem effectum, ut calor a calefaciente in calefactum; sed secundum emanationem intelligibilem, utpote verbi intelligibilis a dicente, quod manet in ipso. Et sic fides Catholica processionem ponit in divinis."

which does not tend to anything external, but remains in the agent itself.”<sup>39</sup> This is why, for Augustine and Thomas, the intellect is the only power able to image procession in this particularly internal way, for, aside from God, only intellect is capable of “an inward procession corresponding to the act remaining within the agent.”<sup>40</sup> Bodily processions, generation and action, are external, and thus, incomplete on their own.<sup>41</sup> The Trinitarian logic can only apply to the intellectual creature, for only an intellect can image the particularly internal processions that constitute the divine life. There is no other analogue for the divine Trinitarian processions described by Augustine and Thomas, and thus, Spencer’s phenomenology of bodily experience does not seem to be able to maintain the particularly internal, Trinitarian character that Thomas insists is required of an image of God.

## Two Approaches Rejected by Aquinas

To see further why, on Thomistic grounds, bodily experience cannot, on principle, yield an image of God according to the internal nature of Trinitarian procession, I submit for examination Thomas’s own rejection of two candidates. In the key article in the *Summa Theologiae* on the image of God,<sup>42</sup> Aquinas cites Augustine’s *Literal Commentary on Genesis*,<sup>43</sup> in which the Doctor of Grace distinguishes between three kinds of vision in the human being: corporeal, spiritual or imaginary, and intellectual. Augustine proposes the possibility that, given the trinity in intellectual vision, according to which human beings (and angels) are created to the image of God, perhaps the image exists in the Trinitarian relations in corporeal and imaginary vision as well. Aquinas’s rejection of these possibilities raises, in my view, serious issues with a phenomenological approach that would appeal to sense experience to elaborate and explain the image of God in the human being, either in the self or in the other.

In both corporeal and imaginary vision one finds a respective trinity. In corporeal vision there is i) the species of the exterior body, ii) an act of vision, whereby there is an impression on the organ of a likeness of the exterior species, and finally, iii) there is “the intention of the will applying the sight to see. . . .”<sup>44</sup> As for imaginary vision, there is a trinity consisting of i) the species preserved in the memory, ii) the vision itself caused by the power of the imagination

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<sup>39</sup> *ST Ia. Q27. A3. co.* And so, the procession of the Word is an intelligible operation, the procession of the Holy Ghost is a procession of love. See *ST Ia. Q93. A6. co.* The Trinity is distinguished by the procession of the Word from the Father, and the procession of Love from them both. It is only the rational creature, according to Aquinas, in which “we find a procession of the word in the intellect, and a procession of the love in the will,” and so only in this creature do we attain to “a certain representation of the species” with respect to Trinitarian procession.

<sup>40</sup> *ST Ia. Q27. A1. co.*; and again, “This applies most conspicuously to the intellect, the action of which remains in the intelligent agent” (*ST Ia. Q27. A1. co.*). Thus, my 4<sup>th</sup> thesis: “An image of God should image not only the Divine Nature, but also the Trinitarian relations between the Divine Persons.”

<sup>41</sup> In *ST Ia. Q93. A3. co.* and *SCG 4.10.18*, Aquinas discusses certain bodily processions and shows how these fall short of the divine processions in the Trinity, more properly imaged by the intellect. Bodily processions, in distinction from intelligible processions, proceed externally in space and successively in time.

<sup>42</sup> *ST Ia. Q93.*

<sup>43</sup> *ST Ia. Q93. A6. arg. 4*

<sup>44</sup> *ST Ia. Q93. A6. ad.4*

informed by this species, and again, iii) the “intention of the will to join both together.”<sup>45</sup> Why couldn’t these powers also image the Divine Trinity in the human being (and indeed in any animals possessing the psychical powers of sensation and imagination)?

As one might expect from what has been said so far, both of these images fail insofar as one of the members of their respective trinities is external to the Trinitarian relation. In corporeal vision, the body seen is exterior to the organ that sees. This might be fine as an Arian *imago dei*, insofar as for him, the Son is not the Father, but it fails to reflect Thomas’s understanding of the Trinity: one substance, three persons. The same problem obtains in imaginary vision. While the species is preserved in the memory, an internal sense, and thus, in this sense, is internal, it nevertheless would not be in the memory if it were not first obtained from sense perception. That is, the species is adventitious—it “comes to” the memory from without. Neither kind of vision, therefore, is self-sufficient, but requires something external for its completion, and thereby, cannot be an image of the uncreated Trinity. In Thomas’s words, “in both cases the species falls short of representing the con-naturality and co-eternity of the Divine Persons.”<sup>46</sup> In intellectual vision, however, the mind, knowledge, and love are not three separate entities. Nor is any external to any other. Only in the rational power of the soul does one find the internality of the relations between the members of the Trinity of Persons properly reflected.

But this is not all. Not only do corporeal and imaginary vision fail to reflect the internally sufficient character of the Trinity of Persons, but further, the procession of Persons in the Trinity is not imaged either. In the Divine Trinity, the procession of the Son is from the Father alone, while the Holy Ghost proceeds from both. Aquinas, in his discussion of corporeal and imaginary vision in this reply likens the external bodily species and the species preserved in memory, respectively, as the Father; the vision that obtains in each case is the Son; and the intention or will of the person to “see” is the Holy Ghost. In each case, vision (the Son) does not proceed only from the external species (as in corporeal vision) or from the species preserved in memory (as in imaginary vision), alone, as the Son proceeds from the Father alone. Rather, for vision to occur, the species requires the powers of sight and imagination. Without these latter, vision, of either type, does not occur. Thus, the “Father” is not simply the species, but rather, the species plus the power of sense, external (the eye) or internal (the imagination). There seem to be two Fathers. Aquinas concludes, “For these reasons, the procession of the Son from the Father alone is not suitably represented.”<sup>47</sup> There is a further problem. The Holy Ghost proceeds from both the Father and the Son. In neither corporeal nor imaginary vision can it be shown how the intention or will to unite proceeds from the species and power of the soul, either sensory or imaginary, together: “Wherefore the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son is not thus properly represented.”<sup>48</sup> These sensory trinities discovered in corporeal and imaginary vision fail as potential images of God: 1) the members of these trinities are external to each other, and 2) the processions are either absent, or fail to represent the processions of the Persons of the Trinity.

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<sup>45</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A6. ad.4

<sup>46</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A6. ad.4

<sup>47</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A6. ad.4

<sup>48</sup> *ST* Ia. Q93. A6. ad.4

One observes a likeness, but not an image.

A phenomenological description of bodily sensation for attaining an image of God, therefore, is going to face a number of problems. An experience of the body of the other as an image of God, insofar as the other is external to the perceiving subject, seems unable, on principle, to image the internal Trinitarian relations required by Thomas to be such an image. Spencer recognises, however, the importance of the Trinitarian relations to the *imago dei*, and attempts to explain how they can be present corporeally:

[the human being is] open to forming a communion of persons with others, just as God is a communion of persons. We image God by forming communions, which is first made possible by the structure of the body as masculine and feminine; for male and female bodies to join together in the right context is to renew the image of God.<sup>49</sup>

Spencer adds, “Furthermore, Christ reveals that God is a communion of Persons—and so we image God best not alone, in our souls, but in a communion of persons.”<sup>50</sup> Again, however, the relations attempting to imitate the Trinity in a human community are external. The other person with which one forms a community is external to the self. Further, this analogy seems to subordinate the individual to the community. Indeed, it is the community that is the image of God, not the man; the person is a part, externally related to the other persons. At best, we yield a kind of collective, or Marxist version of the *imago dei* in the community. There might be a trace of the communion of Divine Persons in the human community, or there might exist some analogy between them, but the human community is not an image of God in the Thomistic sense because the externality of the relata to each other remains a problem.

One sees how important it is for Aquinas that the image of God in the human reflect the Trinitarian life. In order to qualify as an image of God in Thomas’s view, these conditions of internality and proper procession must be met. Anything that falls short is not a proper image, and is at best, a likeness of trace. Aquinas sets out the task one must set for oneself when seeking the image of God in anything, and summarises:<sup>51</sup>

- a) an image is a likeness which in some degree attains to a representation of the species;
- b) any image of God must represent the Divine Trinity by some kind of representation of the species of the Divine Persons, so far as it is possible for a creature to do so;
- c) the Divine Persons are distinguished from each other according to the procession of the word from the speaker, and the procession of love from both;
- d) The Word of God proceeds from God by knowledge of Himself; and
- e) Love proceeds from God according as He loves Himself.

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<sup>49</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 13.

<sup>50</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 2.

<sup>51</sup> In *ST* Ia. Q93. A8. co.

It seems to me that any phenomenology of sense experience will be unable, on Thomistic grounds, to advance our understanding of the image of God, due to the inability of its approach and content to live up to these criteria.

### **Problems for a Phenomenology of the *Imago Dei***

Please allow me to preface the following section with a confession. Maybe it's just me, but whenever I hear someone say that their phenomenological account will help to “make sense” of our experience, I rarely find much more sense being made, or even recall experiencing what is alleged to be “our” experience in the first place: selves revealing their own self relations to themselves, thereby constituting themselves; others constituting the selves of others by manifesting their own selves to others by their very otherness; forget responding to the call of infinite responsibility—the phone hardly ever rings. I tend to feel more creeped out by the “gaze of the other” than I feel called ethically and infinitely to respond to it, and when I notice others “gazing” at me, I usually start to worry that they want to hurt me. Worst of all, I fear that accepting that I don't “get” Levinas reveals that I'm probably just a bad person.

However, I completely agree that a philosophy should correspond to our experience, and this is a sound check against outlandish philosophical claims. Even if a phenomenological account remains within the bounds of clarity, however, I rarely find them very convincing. Whatever one might claim to experience, and argue based upon it, how does one convert the heretic who doesn't share the feeling? As Memorial University's late Prof. James Bradley once whispered to me upon the conclusion of a phenomenologically dense lecture: “well, I don't experience it that way.” Not much else can be said. And arguments about whether one “should” “experience it that way” usually return to ontology and logic, not ethics and descriptions of experience. That is, fundamentally, *contra* Levinas, I believe that ethics is grounded in ontology; ethics is not first philosophy.

But nevertheless, the overlap of experiences (or lack thereof) aside, I would like to focus on a number of internal problems with a phenomenology of sensible experience for developing the Augustinian/Thomistic notion of the image of God. Certainly, one could alter one's requirements for what an such image must be, but i) the emendations that Dr. Spencer makes, drawing from phenomenological descriptions, to my mind, move very far afield from Thomas's notion of image, and ii) they run counter to other and deeper of the Angelic Doctor's philosophical principles and commitments. In the end, Dr. Spencer is right, however, that these are not just semantic quibbles: how one understands the image of God has serious ramifications for one's anthropology and ethics, (again, I think, showing that how one behaves, and ought to behave, depends upon how things are—ontology is prior to ethics).

Dr. Spencer argues that the image of God is not only present in the human soul, “but it is also present in our bodies and relationships, such that it is perceivable in and belongs to the

whole person.”<sup>52</sup> If I understand correctly, for Spencer, bodily perception (corporeal sensation) of the physical body of the other (as a principle of the whole human person) reveals the image of God in that other bodily and on bodily terms, that is, the body is not just a *means through which* the psychological image of God is made manifest physically in the hylomorphic substance and available to the corporeal senses, but rather, the image of God is somehow *in* the human body itself and revealed corporeally in the human person’s bodily relations to others.

Dr. Spencer draws upon Emmanuel Levinas, among others, to explain this phenomenological experience of the bodily image of God in others (and through them, in ourselves):

But in the expressivity of the other’s face and acts of speaking, I encounter what is unpredictable and unconceptualizable—that is, what is Infinite, a “trace” of God—to which I must respond, before which I am responsible. I experience myself as being in the image of God, called to the Infinite, in receiving this call to infinite responsibility. All these experiences are bodily: I encounter the infinite in the look and speaking of the other, in his suffering, hunger, and bodily vulnerability. I find myself called not in cognitively grasping an ethical duty, but in feeling my call to aid the other bodily. Contrary to the first problematic anthropology, dualism, I experience my directedness to the infinite not just in my soul, but in my body too, and not in self-cognition or love, but in being ethically called by and to the other.<sup>53</sup>

Dr. Spencer emphasises the bodily character of the encounter, through which one perceives the infinite in the other person and feels a subsequent openness to this infinite in the other which compels one to respond ethically. The infinite is perceived in the bodies of the other person and oneself; that is, through the encounter with the other, there is a “discovery of the image of God in the infinitude of one’s flesh.”<sup>54</sup> We have not seen Augustine or Aquinas use the notion of ‘the infinite’ as a term of likeness between the human being and the Divine Nature. However, insofar as God is infinite, there seems no reason on the face of it to exclude the human from being an image of God accordingly if, indeed, there were something infinite in the human being.

Levinas provides a description of his experience, and one’s experience is one’s experience. If you feel cold and I feel hot, and the thermostat says it’s 95 degrees, you don’t warm up when this fact is pointed out. If you feel cold, you feel cold, and there’s a kind of certainty and truth in that (a subjective one, but a kind of truth nonetheless). I’ve never experienced the infinitude of one’s flesh in the face of the other, but I wonder, on philosophical grounds, about the character of the alleged experience—where is it really coming from? Perhaps the face of the other could be a sign of the infinite, or point toward infinitude, but any infinitude

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<sup>52</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 11.

<sup>54</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 12.

experienced in perception can only be the bad, not the good (philosophical) infinite. The philosophical infinite is often characterised as the infinite which is lacking nothing—all is present to it at once—or, as many philosophers have suggested, a sphere with its centre everywhere and circumference nowhere. This is the divine infinite, neither persisting through time in temporal succession, nor lacking in any perfection. As Aristotle claims, and Thomas affirms, God is pure act.<sup>55</sup> Now the human is nothing like this: it is hard to see how the human being images the divine infinity. There might be some likeness to God's infinitude in the person, but not all likenesses are images, as we have seen.

The “bad infinite” is the infinite of motion and change—the infinite of Heraclitus and Cratylus. Cratylus might say that Heraclitus is wrong to attest that we cannot step into the same river twice, because we never step into it once: there never is a river. One might consider it as the mathematical infinite, the  $n+1$ , forever continuing on in sempiternity. The body is embroiled within this material flux, and this is precisely why, from Heraclitus, through Plato and Aristotle, to Augustine, and to Aquinas, the singular, the material, the finite particular, cannot be known. This is not because there is an overflow of infinite meaning or some such, but rather, because particulars cannot be nailed down in their ever-changing particularity. One does not know Socrates; one knows man.

As Dr. Spencer recounts, Jean-Luc Marion “argues that the image does not involve adequate self-understanding and love; rather, it involves seeing that I cannot be grasped in any finite image or concept. . . .”<sup>56</sup> The relative infinite perceived through finite experience might indeed “exceed words,” as Tina Beattie suggests, and, as Spencer confirms, one cannot know the other, since that would reduce the infinite of the other to a “finite, controllable concept in me.”<sup>57</sup> But again, the inability to subsume a particular body under a concept while retaining its accidental particularity is not due to any overflow of positive character. Corporeal bodies, of any kind, cannot be defined because of the potencies of matter.<sup>58</sup>

There is a sense in which I would agree that there might be an infinite “saturation” experienced through one's physical encounter with the other. Dr. Spencer, distinguishing Levinas from Marion, describes it thus:

I can be cognitively aware of the other's face as an “icon,” which “saturates” or exceeds all that I could conceptualize about the other; to know in this sense is not primarily to find oneself actualised by the other, but to make contact with the inexhaustible richness and depths of the other.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *ST* Ia. Q4. A1. co.

<sup>56</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 12.

<sup>57</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 11.

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas writes, “Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and primarily. The reason of this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter, whereas our intellect, as have said [*sic*] above (Question [85], Article [1]), understands by abstracting the intelligible species from such matter” (*ST* Ia. Q86. A1. co.).

<sup>59</sup> He continues, “The image of God, the Infinite in the human person, appears in the incomprehensible depths of the

There is a certain inexhaustibility of the face of another. I can sit here all day long and try to imagine all the ways the face of another can appear to me, and never enumerate them all. In fact, as Descartes rightly pointed out, if I thought I could imagine all the ways that a finite body—pick any one you want—could appear to my senses, I would clearly be wrong about what I thought a finite body was. Included in knowing what a finite body is, is the knowledge that I could never imagine the infinitude of ways it could appear. The human body, *qua* body, is no different from any other body on this count. The body, therefore, this “ever-changing flesh,”<sup>60</sup> to borrow the phrase, can hardly be an image of God, the only pure act.

Further, material bodies, being in constant motion, change, and flux, are always lacking something, vulnerable, and weak. As Dr. Spencer points out, we perceive the other’s “suffering, hunger, and bodily vulnerability,” the very failings that call out for another’s succor. There is certainly a logic of ethics present here, that the need for an ethical response to the other is tied up with the other’s bodily (and mental) lack and subsequent need, but it is not clear how this bodily lack, need, weakness, and vulnerability, even if it were infinite, can reflect the divine infinite whereby one could thereby claim that there is an image of God in the body. God is nothing like this.

I submit that any experience of infinitude drawn from an encounter with a physical body can only be the infinite of motion, not an image of divine infinity. The nature of perceptible flux and change resists words because it is always in motion, and always in motion because it is always lacking, actualising one potentiality to the loss of another actuality. This is not divine transcendence, which resists words and concepts because it surpasses all attempts to limit and determine. Indeed, even the infinitude of motion is not perceived *per se*, but rather, is an intellectual abstraction from the continual motion that we do perceive.

In the end, any phenomenology of perception also fails to measure up to the nature of the Trinitarian relations. All sensible perception is adventitious, and therefore, requires a measure of externality. Aquinas has rejected external and adventitious experience as a proper image of the internality of the Trinitarian relations, and thereby, as a source through which to attain an image of God. I suggest, therefore, that one does not “see” the infinite in the face of the other, unless one is using the word “infinite” in a secular way, and the word “see” metaphorically. But when it comes to another’s private, subjective experience, who am I to judge?

### **Perceiving the Image of God “In,” or “Through” the Body?**

The experience of the infinite in the bodily encounter with the other could, perhaps, be explained on Thomistic terms. I would argue that whatever is experienced by the phenomenologist as bodily “contact with the inexhaustible richness and depths of the other” is

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other, which appear in analogy to the incomprehensible depths of God.” (Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 12).

<sup>60</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 12.

not the infinite perceived in the body, but rather, the image of God in the person's rational soul perceived through the hylomorphic union of soul and body. As Dr. Spencer points out, for Thomas, ". . . the human body contains signs of the image of God in our souls."<sup>61</sup> The human being is the image of God insofar as she has a rational soul, because of which one experiences the human in a way different from how one encounters any other being. It might be one's bodily actions that suggest the presence of a rational soul—the human acts differently than does a tree or cat—and I perceive these actions with my corporeal senses, but it is still the soul of the human composite, not the body *qua* body that is the locus of this image. Just because the image of God might be revealed through the body/soul union, or if we feel called toward the infinite bodily, it does not follow that the image of God is necessarily present in the body.

If the body is bringing something to the table regarding the image of God, not just as the means through which we encounter the psychical image of God physically, but as providing positive content to the image on its own, corporeal terms, I ask, at the risk of sounding macabre: does one feel the inexhaustible richness and depths of the other in the dead "human" body? If there is something particular about the body, then shouldn't one feel such an incomprehensibility in the presence of a corpse? The soul, as an intelligent substantial form, retains the image of God without the body; the body, however, whether or not it possesses an image of God as a co-principle of the hylomorphic substance, certainly seems to lack such an image once the soul has taken flight.

Crucial here is the distinction between the souls of hylomorphic substances and intellectual, separated souls. It is the very presence of the human soul that makes the human body a "human" body at all. Without the soul, the human body undergoes a substantial change, and is human only in name. The body and soul of hylomorphic compounds are separable only in thought and language—not in reality, and certainly not in perception; the distinction between body and soul in the compound is a formal, not a real distinction. The intellectual soul, however, is still a soul without the body, but the reverse is not true. This is why one can isolate the image of God in the soul apart from the body.

It would be difficult, therefore, through experiencing the hylomorphic compound to isolate anything particularly "psychical" (if the soul were simply a material form) or "bodily" at all. If one could isolate a bodily or psychical note, it would only be in abstraction, not in reality or in perception, for in both reality and perception, the two are always together (as long as what is perceived is a *human* being). The body, however, has no independence apart from the soul. Thus, in the composite, if the body does contribute anything to the image of God, I can't comprehend exactly what that could be in distinction from the soul principle of the compound, and I could not, on principle, experience that isolated bodily contribution apart from the soul principle in sensible experience. Thus, on principle, I cannot see how one can "perceive the image of God in the whole human person," unless one means that through perception of the human body/soul composite, is revealed the image of God in the person's intellectual soul. That

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<sup>61</sup> Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 9.

is, there is a *sign* of the intellectual image of God in the human body—precisely what Thomas claims. Dr. Spencer, however, rejects this explanation that the cause of this experience is the inner image of God, manifest somehow through the bodily actions of the human, and thereby, in a way, perceived. He writes,

The relation between interior and exterior aspects of the image, is not given as a causal or signifying relation: the fleshy image does not signify a distinct interior image, nor is it caused by the latter. Rather, a single image appears in matter and in sensory and intellectual acts.<sup>62</sup>

Dr. Spencer wants to collapse the sign/signified distinction in Thomas's view that the body is a sign of the soul's image of God. That is, these phenomenologists claim that the experience of the image is not mediated. Spencer asserts, "I perceive the Infinite directly in the face of the other and in my own flesh."<sup>63</sup> He continues,

. . . instead of being signified, interior acts can be directly "expressed" in the facial features and bodily acts of persons. I do not see another's facial expression and then infer his or her sadness or joy. Rather, the exterior appearance and the interior act or state are given as one thing seen from two sides, but with a hierarchical structure, the interior "side" of the single phenomenon given as objectively more fundamental than the exterior. . . . The person is given as having a bodily surface and spiritual depths—though there is unity or intertwining between the two, the relation between them is hierarchical. The two are not sundered as on dualism would do, but they also are not merely causally related or related by signification, for they are given as one.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Spencer emphasises an important truth here. According to hylomorphism, it is not as if the soul and the body (or form and matter) are distinct things somehow joined. Rather, the soul as material form, in a sense, *is* its acts. It is the actualisation of the body in particular soul-acts. The body is only a human body insofar as it does particularly human things. The soul is the soul only insofar as the body is actualised in particular activities of life, such as eating, walking, and growing. What is a soul?: it is the particular activities of a certain kind of body. As my own professor, Dr. John Scott, used to tell us, on a certain level, solving  $E=MC^2$  is the same as eating a sandwich. Both are actualisations of certain kinds of bodies in certain kinds of acts, which we call "life."

However, for Thomas (and Aristotle, as Thomas reads him), there are certain kinds of soul acts that are precisely *not* actualisations of bodily potencies—the mental acts of intellect and will. Whatever bodily actions one perceives when (we assume) another is intelligising and

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<sup>62</sup> Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 12.

<sup>63</sup> Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 13.

<sup>64</sup> Spencer, "Perceiving the Image," 13.

willing, these internal acts are not expressed bodily as two sides of the same coin as are the soul-acts of the lower animals. Further, the acts of intelligence and will are the ones, Thomas claims, according to which the human is said to be created to the image God. It is right that true hylomorphism gives us two principles (body and soul) in the one, unified substance. But to extend the image of God to the bodily side of this union is also to extend the image of God to other creatures that perform the same biological actions: certainly to Fido, and, depending on how far down the great chain of being one wants to climb, to the chrysanthemums in your garden, all the while leaving the disembodied Raphael and Gabriel out in the cold.<sup>65</sup>

I wonder whether the “problem” that the body is not included by Augustine and Thomas in their notions of the image of God arises from re-reading back into Aristotelian hylomorphism a Cartesian dualism that Aristotle denies: that there are really two distinct substances—the human body and the human soul—and all hylomorphism does it stick them together into one substance, avoiding both Spinozist parallelism and Cartesian remote-control causality. That is, a Cartesian trying to understand hylomorphism might maintain a *real* distinction between body and soul, but thinks that Aristotle just welds them together. Under this view, the body is still a real, separate thing, needing to be accounted for when anything is claimed of the soul, given that they are mysteriously united. In trying to say, “Hey, don’t forget the body too!,” are we not just separating what does not exist separately from soul in the first place? But because body and soul are always together for Aristotle (not as a union, but as actualisation of potential), that is, the soul is defined through the body, one could not ‘leave the body behind’ even if he wanted to (if he really believed in hylomorphism), any more than one could leave the soul behind. Ever since Descartes pushed the hylomorphic Humpty Dumpty off the wall, all of philosophy’s women and men have spent a lot of time trying to put them back together again. Just leave him alone up there!

To perceive the image of God in the body through the notion that the internal acts by which the human is the image of God are at once (not by signification, but by their very nature) external bodily acts is contrary to certain fundamental Thomistic positions: namely, 1) the acts by which the human is said to be an image of God are not the acts of a hylomorphic soul/body composite, but the acts of the soul *qua* separable intellect—intelligence and will do not actualise a bodily organ. Unless one is some sort of materialist, it seems difficult to get around this; 2) If one wants to suggest other acts that are the soul’s actualisations of the body’s potential, which

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<sup>65</sup> Aristotle seemed to think, depending on how one reads *De Anima* iii, that (the unmoved movers aside) the rational acts of the soul, despite them not requiring a bodily organ, are never found independently of the lower acts of the soul (vegetative and sensitive); that is, he builds his world from the ground up. Thomas, however, builds it from the top down: there are substantial forms, that is, separated intellectual substances. The human soul is at once an intellectual substance and the form of the body. Yet, even for Aristotle, although these particular acts of the rational soul are acts of a soul united to a body, the body is not implicated in these acts. Thomas is actually astonished that people could read Aristotle in any other way. Thomas writes, “All these indications show that he [Aristotle] did not assert that the intellect was a separate substance. Indeed, it is astonishing how easily some have let themselves be deceived by his calling the intellect separate; for the text makes itself perfectly clear what he means, - namely that, unlike the senses, the intellect has no bodily organ. For the nobility of the human soul transcends the scope and limits of bodily matter. Hence it enjoys a certain activity in which bodily matter has no share; the potentiality to which activity is without a bodily organ; and in this sense only is it a ‘separate’ intellect” (*In de Anima* 3.7.698-99).

can be perceived insofar as they are at once internal and external, that image God, a) what are they exactly, and b) how, again, is the human distinct from other animals and plants that also possess souls as material forms?

### Natural and Rational Love

Dr. Spencer also argues that the bodily experience of image of God involves a movement toward the infinite. He writes, “According to these phenomenologists, the experience of the image of God is of the impulsion toward the Infinite in us, which is simultaneously bodily, transcendent, and inward.”<sup>66</sup> One wonders, however, how the impulsion towards the infinite itself would distinguish the human being from any other creature. Why this particular impulsion toward the infinite is characterised as the experience of the image of God is unclear, but further, it blurs the distinction between natural and rational love, which, I argue, further obscures the difference between the human as the image of God and the lower animals. In Dante’s *Purgatorio* Virgil explains to the pilgrim,

‘Neither creator nor creature was ever,’  
He then began, ‘my son, without love,  
Either natural or rational; you know that.

Natural love is always without error,  
But the other kind may err, in the wrong object,  
Or else through too much or too little vigour.

While it is directed to the primal good,  
And keeps to its limits in relation to the secondary,  
It cannot be the occasion of sinful pleasure;

But when it is twisted to evil, or seeks the good  
With more or with less concern than it ought to have,  
The creature is working against the creator.

(*Purg.* 17.90-102)<sup>67</sup>

Natural love is present in every creature as the impulse to reach its own end or fulfil its own nature—the whole of creation is teleologically involved in the love of God, as He moves all things by being loved. As the acorn becomes an oak, it loves God—not in any willed or conscious sense, but in a natural sense, as it pursues and achieves its divinely allotted end and good. All things have an impulsion towards the infinite in this sense, to do what God wills. How, then, this particular impulsion is an image of God in the human, to the exclusion the rest of creation, is not clear. Certainly it is what Aquinas calls, a trace, insofar as the impulsion is a

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<sup>66</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 12.

<sup>67</sup> I use the text in Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. C.H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

presence of the cause in the effect, and all effects seek to return to their causes, but it is not an image as defined by Thomas.

In the human being (and in the angel), this love also has a rational character insofar as the Infinite Good can be known and willed, the object of love understood and chosen. Natural love is just an unwavering natural tendency; rational love, however, either by faulty aim, or by too much or too little zeal with respect to the actual good of the object loved, can err or hit the mark. Lower creation runs its course in the love of God, but humans and angels have the ability, on the one hand, to pervert the object of desire and to pursue in excess or deficiency, or, on the other, to will the good that is known. The distinction here, again, is in the intellect. It is the rational soul, as created to the image of God, that distinguishes the human and angelic being from all other creatures. To see the impulsion toward the Infinite as an image of God without distinguishing rational love from natural, and identifying the former as the image, again, tends towards leveling the hierarchy of being, contrary to fundamental Thomistic metaphysical positions.

## Conclusion

Dr. Spencer writes, “. . . many reject the Augustinian approach by contending that it undergirds an inadequate, dualist anthropology, on which I am primarily my soul, and the body is a mere aid (or prison) to the soul, or imitates God only through the soul.”<sup>68</sup> I agree that dualisms of the Cartesian sort must be avoided insofar as they provide inadequate anthropologies of the human person, and because they contradict both experience and reason. And while I resist the characterisation of Platonism as ‘dualistic,’ it too presents difficulties that hylomorphic accounts of the human being mitigate. But it is unclear how, exactly, the human imitating God only through her soul is necessarily connected to the problems of dualist anthropologies and negative, anti-cosmic views of the body. In the end, the body gets a pretty good deal under Thomistic hylomorphism. Indeed, “it was for the soul’s good that it was united to a body.”<sup>69</sup> There is still a kind of elevation and dignity of the human body, even if it is not an image of God, but kept in its proper hierarchical place.

Even if one believes this estimation of the body too low, does it matter? Aside from the admittedly metaphysically problematic time between the Particular and General Judgements, we’ve always got a body anyway, which is, in some sense, by its association with the soul, implicated in our being created to the image of God. The doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body, far from causing problems for thinking the image of God is in the soul alone, rather ensures that that the human being will possess a body in eternity.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the period between

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<sup>68</sup> Spencer, “Perceiving the Image,” 2.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas writes, “It is clear then that it was for the soul’s good that it was united to a body, and that it understands by turning to the phantasms. Nevertheless it is possible for it to exist apart from the body, and also to understand in another way” (*ST* Ia. Q89. A1. co.). Elsewhere, Aquinas writes, “Although the intellective power is not the act of a body, nevertheless the essence of the human soul, which is the form of the body, requires that it should be more noble, in order that it may have the power of understanding; and hence it is necessary that a better disposed body should correspond to it” (*ST* III. Q5. A4. ad 3).

<sup>70</sup> In fact, Dante’s depiction of the suicides in *Inferno* 13, trapped in the bodies of trees from which their previous

the Particular and the General Judgements is only a problem for those who seek to find the *imago dei* in the body, because it is precisely this that is lost in the time between the Judgements. Is the separated soul less an image of God during the inter-Judgemental period? I can't help but feel that being concerned about the body being "left out" is kind of like looking at my hand and lamenting that it can't see, or thinking that it would be great if I had a bed in my bathroom too. It's not unlike feeling bad for the canvas because the paint is more what makes the Mona Lisa, well, the Mona Lisa. Perhaps our relatively recent philosophical and theological obsessions with the body are forms of penance for our transgression of philosophically separating soul and body, counter to experience, or altogether denying their distinction. Philosophy has since become, like the rest of the world, rather body-obsessed. If the old Victorian sensibilities were one end of the pendulum, I feel that it won't be too long before we find ourselves yanked back in their direction.

Montague Brown addresses directly why is it important whether the image of God is in the soul alone or in the whole human composite. He argues that "It matters because there are dangers to the faith if the *imago dei* is said to be found merely in the intellect."<sup>71</sup> I wonder, however, in an attempt to recover the body, have we gone too far from the sound Catholic position maintaining the unity of the body and soul in the human being, while maintaining their hierarchical relation. That is, that there are dangers to the faith from the other direction. The corrections of Cartesianism and certain Platonic tendencies to identify the person with the soul alone, I worry, tend towards an opposite kind of error—the deification of the body and this life in the "here and now" to the neglect of the afterlife, and the flattening of the ontological hierarchy of being.<sup>72</sup>

The hierarchical distinctions between the grades of being will always, through all eternity, be stratified.<sup>73</sup> As Dante has shown poetically, not all of us will enjoy the beatific vision to the same degree either. But in Heaven, we won't care. Dante asks Piccarda, dwelling in the lowest of the heavenly spheres:

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fleshy bodies hang, lifelessly, just beyond reach, was cause for some scandal. As Boccaccio immediately pointed out, this punishment "is strictly contrary to Catholic truth." See my "'How Does the Body Depart?': A Neoplatonic Reading of Dante's Suicides," *Dante Studies* CXXXII (2014): 175-200, at 193. The fate of the suicides is arguably worse than that of any other in hell, separated, as they are, for all eternity from their very human nature. But the image is a poetic fiction, illustrating, however, a truth about human nature. It's not as if one need to worry about losing the image of God if it is in the soul alone, unless one fears that one might literally lose one's soul and still somehow exist as a human being.

<sup>71</sup> Brown, "*Imago Dei* in Thomas Aquinas," 8.

<sup>72</sup> Brown's most convincing reason, to my mind, for locating the image of God in the whole human person has to do with the Incarnation (See *ibid.*, 8-9). But here, it is Christ who lowers himself to us, taking on human nature—not that our human nature is deified, or raised up to equality with the divine.

<sup>73</sup> Here too, Aquinas seems to part ways with Augustine (and Anselm). For Thomas, there is a Dionysian hierarchy of disembodied angels. In the afterlife, when the human being regains her body, this distinction between the human and the angels (among the intellectual distinctions between the very angels themselves) remains. For Augustine, human beings in heaven will, after the General Judgement, be made absolutely equal to the angels. He can say this because, for him, angels possess fiery bodies—the very bodies into which fleshy human bodies will be transformed in the afterlife. See my "'aequales angelis sunt': Demonology, Angelology, and the Resurrection of the Body in Augustine and Anselm," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 12.1 (Fall 2016): 1-18.

But tell me: you who are happy here,  
Do you desire a higher place than you have,  
To see more, and be more friends with God?  
(*Par.* 3.64-66)

She responds,

‘Brother, the virtue of charity brings quiet  
To our will, so that we want only  
What we have, and thirst for nothing beyond that.

If we desired to be higher up  
Our wishes would not be in accordance  
With the will of him who sets us here; [...]

It is indeed the essence of this life  
That we keep ourselves within the divine will,  
So that our wills may be made one with his:

So that, how we are at various thresholds  
Throughout this kingdom, pleases the whole kingdom  
As it does the king who rouses us to his will;

And in his will we find our peace:  
It is the sea to which everything moves  
Which it creates and which nature makes.’

Then it was clear to me how everywhere  
In heaven is paradise, although the grace  
Of the highest good does not fall on all in one way.  
(*Par.* 3.70-90)

The human being is a hinge between the animal and angelic natures, in Neoplatonic fashion, taking part in both. Thomas preserves the knife-edge balance, neither diminishing the angel, nor raising the brute or community to equality with the human. I believe Thomas is right to maintain that “this image of God is not found even in the rational creature except in the mind.”<sup>74</sup> One could always respond that this doctrine fails to account for one’s experience, but in addition to the philosophical arguments against this charge, I still must respond, as Prof. Bradley used to say, “I don’t experience it that way.”

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<sup>74</sup> *ST* Ia. Q.93. A6.