

WHO AM I? AND HOW DOES SELF-KNOWLEDGE ENABLE ME TO LOVE OTHERS AS MYSELF?

Gn 1: 26, 27; 5:1; 9:6; Eccl 3:11; I Cor 2:7-16

I. CENTRAL HUMAN VOCATION:

- A. Socrates: “know thyself”
- B. Augustine: “I would know you [God], I would know myself” (*Confessions*)

II. ERRING ENDEAVORS (albeit enlightening in many ways)

- A. Humanistic Psychology & “popular psychology” impact—therapy replaces redemption, adjustment replaces repentance, counseling replaces proclamation (P. Rieff’s *Triumph of the Therapeutic*)
 1. Self-actualization (Abraham Maslow)—lament in Browder’s *Subverted*
 2. Client-centered counseling (Carl Rogers)—propounded by professors of pastoral ministry
 3. Student-centered education (John Dewey)—classic curriculum dissolved, skills emphasized
 4. Sexual-liberation solutions (Sigmund Freud)—“Cosmo Girl” of H.G. Brown pervasive ethos
 5. Behavioristic determinism (B.F. Skinner)—S-R key; *Beyond Freedom & Dignity*
 6. Self-esteem secrets (Robert Shuller & professional educators)—“New Reformation” success in many pulpits; overarching goal of public schools (as evident in grade inflation etc.)
- B. Philosophical Theories—enduring positions
 1. Plato’s dualism—spirit disconnected from body (i.e. Hinduism & Christian Science)
 2. Aristotle’s hylomorphism—soul gives form to body (developed by Aquinas & Moreland)
 3. Epicurus’ materialism—atoms-in-motion all there is (Lucretius & recent *Swerve*)
 4. John Locke’s *tabula rasa*—environment shapes self (i.e. criminologists blame “society” for ills)
 5. Darwin’s naturalism—evolving biological beings (current “environmental psychology”)
 6. Marx’s economic determinism—stuff is all you need (most political parties assume & promise)

III. IMAGO DEI ANSWER

- A. In light of trinitarian God: Father (source of being); Son (Word); Spirit (Love)
- B. Trinitarian *imago* (God-breathed “image” endures, though “likeness” lost in Fall (Irenaeus)
 1. Spiritual Being (divine *aseity*); “God is Spirit” (Jn 4:24); my “spirit” (Mk 14:38)
 - a. Immortal original core (image), craving eternal life (man’s natural estate—Eccl 3:11)
 1. Anthropological data: earliest evidences certify longing—cf. GKC’s *Everlasting Man*
 2. Life-after-death testimonies persuasive—cf. John Burke’s *Imagine Heaven: Near-Death Experiences, God’s Promises, and the Exhilarating Future That Awaits You*
 - b. Consciousness unique—understandable as non-material reality—cf. Robert Spitzer’s *Ten Universal Principles* re “trans-material” reality to human being
 - c. Therefore:
 1. Affirm (“let it be . . . it is good”)—being, life itself good in itself—pro-creation, pro-life
 2. Assist (do no harm, promote life)—nurture environment, persons, society
 2. Rational—Homo Sapiens—(*Logos*)
 - a. Innate capacities remarkable, reflecting Mind-filled Cosmos (evident in tiniest cells!)
 1. Language—innate grammar (cf. Noam Chomsky), mysteriously mastered as child
 2. Mathematics—apparently intrinsic to mind (cf. Plato’s *Ion*)
 3. God-awareness—religious aspirations, metaphysical longing
 - b. Developmental potential—benefiting from schools, books, seminars (even Sunday school!)
 - c. Therefore:
 - a. Respect minds—in conversations, teaching, preaching; elevating, not “dumbing down”
 - b. Educate persons—*e-ducre* (leading out from darkness to light)
 3. Volitional—will actualizes inner being
 - a. Freedom of the will essential—intellectual, ethical decisions impossible without choice
 - b. Cultivation crucial—virtues, both personal and social, solidified through habits;
 - c. Therefore:
 - a. Acknowledge personal responsibility: schools, jobs, courts; Final Judgment
 - b. Encourage virtuous living—thread from Aristotle through Tocqueville to Wm. Bennett (*Book of Virtues*) and Eric Metaxas (*If You Can Keep It*)

IMAGO DEI

All sin, said St. Augustine, is a form of lying, so we generally struggle to speak truthfully about ourselves. Compelled to do so in order to resist Communist mendacity, Vaclav Havel, the dissident playwright who moved from a prison cell to leading a liberated Czechoslovakia, said he'd given himself to "*living in truth*." Centuries earlier, the same theme was enunciated by one of the earliest Christian thinkers, St. Clement of Alexandria, who wrote: "it is the greatest of all disciplines to know oneself; for when one knows himself, one knows God." So too said St. Catherine of Genoa a millennium later:

I would have you never cease increasing the fuel for the fire of holy desire, that is, the wood of self-knowledge. This is the wood that nourishes and feeds the fire of divine love; this love is acquired by the knowledge of self and the inestimable love of God. . . . The more fuel one gives to the fire, so much the more increases the warmth of the love of Christ and of neighbor. So remain hidden in the knowledge of self.

Concern for rightly defining human nature appeared in the second century, when St. Irenaeus of Lyons sought to refute Gnosticism in *Against Heresies*. Arguing that God is good and created a good world—man included—Irenaeus defined him as sinful, but not *totally* depraved. In Adam's fall, we all fell, but we didn't utterly lose the "image of God" wherein we were created. As James Carpenter explains, in *Nature & Grace*, Adam and Eve still had "life, even if not true life, by the gift of God They [and we too] can follow the divine commandments since a small seed of righteousness remained in them and, above all else, they retain the capacity to receive God" (p. 23). Adam lost the *likeness* (the *similitudo Dei*) to God, but not the *image* of God. He lost the pristine freedom to be like God, and with this he lost the bodily incorruptibility and immortality that originally denoted his likeness to God. Subsequent to the Fall, James Carpenter explains: "The image of God is therefore the capacity for God; the likeness is the capacity fulfilled through a renewed participation in the life of God. Such participation was possible only through an utterly gratuitous act of God. It awaited the gift of the one in whom the image and likeness were altogether coincident, the embodiment of the Word in the second Adam (*ibid.*).

That we are created "in the image of God" is a declarative sentence, a propositional truth. In the 21st century, however, insofar as "postmodern" thinkers deny all "truth claims," many people doubt there's any definable truth regarding human nature—even questioning whether or not we have a "self" discernibly different from our body. Rather, we're told that we *construct* rather than find truth and imagine that everything is "socially constructed" rather than *given* to us. So we can "become anything we want" or choose any one of half-a-dozen "gender identities" which may shift during our journey through life. In *The Death of Truth*, Dennis McCallum says: "Postmodernism, as it applies to our everyday lives, is the death of truth as we know it" (p. 14). So we routinely hear folks say that "Truth is whatever you believe" or "There is no absolute truth." Thus there is no "truth"—nothing intrinsic to human nature. Yet such thinkers, for all their *avant garde* posturing, simply espouse an ancient philosophical materialism, reducing everything—ourselves included—to material processes and their consequent entities.

Thus "evolutionary psychologists" repeat endlessly assert we are nothing more than cells and neurons, mechanically following mechanical biological and chemical laws. They detect only slight differences between human beings and other animals and exclusively employ the empirical sciences to substantiate their views. Reducing man to a machine, portraying the mind as a purely material entity—akin to the clockwork universe derived from Newton's Laws—provides one of the main pillars of secularism. Such materialism has roots in Greek antiquity, especially in the hedonistic philosophy of Epicurus, an anti-supernatural cosmological materialism. Thanks especially to Charles Darwin, materialism today pervades virtually all branches of science, ranging from astronomy to microbiology, and naturalistic thinkers insist that everything that exists can be reduced to simply material entities.

BODY & SOUL

In *Body & Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics*, J.P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, two professors at the Talbot School of Theology, set forth a persuasive defense of a very traditional Christian anthropology, evident in Boethius' classic definition of a person as "an individual substance with a rational nature." This provides one a deeply metaphysical identity—one is who he is, a particular being of enduring worth. Awash in our scientifically-shaped culture, steadily reducing "reality" to materiality, man's nature has suffered serious debasement, diminished to an epiphenomenon of purely natural processes. "Evangelicals" like Karl Giberson have embraced science as "the most epistemologically secure perspective that we have." But it leads, inexorably, to the reduction of human nature to empirically-evident biological data—a purely material composite, a collection of biochemical parts, a "property-thing" (to use the currently popular philosophical designation) rather than an "individual substance." Some Christian "complementarians" envision "higher-level" properties that distinguish man as man, but deny him any discrete, purely spiritual essence. Thus we find numbers of such thinkers arguing that when we die we simply die—it's dust to dust. In the final resurrection, hopefully, God (if there be a God) will raise us as "resurrected bodies." But there is no "soul" *per se* that eludes the grave.

Au contraire, Moreland and Rae insist there's a discrete, *really real* soul that gives the body its form. We need a restored awareness of our spiritual "substance," a confidence that our deepest self is more than matter. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, USC's Dallas Willard says: "To understand spirit as 'substance' is of the utmost importance," because, rightly understood, for both God and man, "spirit is something that exists in its own right" (p. 8). The word substance fuses *sub* (which means under) with *stance* (which means stand); so substance means what stands under what appears to be—what *really is*. Aristotle discerned this clearly, writing: "That which is a whole and has a certain shape and form is one in a still higher degree; and especially if a thing is of this sort by nature, and not by force like the things which are unified by glue or nails or by being tied together, i.e., if it has in itself the cause of its continuity" (*Metaphysics* 1052a.22-25).

So Moreland and Rae argue we are both body and soul. They reach back to the 13th century and refurbish a "Thomistic dualism." Importantly, unlike rationalistic philosophers following Descartes, "Thomistic dualism focuses on the soul, not the mind. The mind is a faculty of the soul, but the latter goes beyond mental functioning and serves as the integrative ground and developer of the body it animates and makes alive" (p. 21). Like the artist moving his brush, the soul arranges the genes, drives the DNA, shapes the molecules, forms the frame. Thomistic dualism holds that the "soul contains capacities for biological as well as mental functioning. Thus the soul is related to the body more intimately and fully than by way of an external causal connection, as Cartesians would have it" (p. 21).

A critical component of this position concerns the freedom of the will. Cornell University's William Provine, an acclaimed naturalistic, atheistic biologist, understands the implications of his stance, stating: "Free will as it is traditionally conceived . . . simply does not exist. . . . There is no way that the evolutionary process as it is currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make choices" (p. 105). Only if one is a rational person, free to choose non-empirical goods, independent of material processes, can he transcend the flux of nature. As John Finnis wisely says: "Everything in ethics depends on the distinction between the good as experienced and the good as intelligible" (*Fundamentals of Ethics*, 42). Only free moral agents, of course, choose to do good or evil.

So, as the subtitle indicates, Moreland and Rae deal extensively with ethics. If a person is a discrete, ontological substance, there simply cannot be "degrees" of personhood. Age and physical condition do not add to or detract from one's status as a person. "For the Thomist it is impossible for there to be a human nonperson" (p. 225). Facing today's complex biomedical questions, when unborn babies are discarded as "fetuses" (i.e. not-quite-human), and elderly folks are "euthanized" (having forfeited their "personhood"), the Thomist insistence that we are *essentially* (not developmentally) human truly makes a difference. Moreland and Rae say: "Our view is that zygotes, embryos, fetuses, newborns, children and adults are all persons, though each is at a different stage of development and maturity. A clear continuity of personal identity is bound up with the human person's being a substance in the Thomistic sense" (p. 270).

"Body & Soul is a quality piece of philosophical work," says Stephen Evans. It is carefully argued, attuned to contemporary scholarship, and adroit in applying the insights St Thomas Aquinas to today's questions. Though a bit technical at points, the book is generally accessible to folks outside the academy who understand the importance of its focus.

“Body and Soul”

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