Article

The Divine Idea of the Self and Contemporary Culture

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Abstract: Taking as its point of departure Pope Benedict XVI's comment that '[e]ach of us is the result of a thought of God', this article explores how the divine idea of the self bears promise for enabling a Catholic theological response to certain features of contemporary Western culture. This cultural setting is discussed first, using the interpretations of Philip Rieff and Carl R. Trueman, and their conceptualities of 'psychological man' and 'expressive individualism'. The dominant contemporary view of human identity thus presented is markedly individualistic, being focused on an inward sense of self. The dominant approach to human meaning is similarly individualistic, being the satisfaction or expression of that sense of self. While both Rieff and Trueman point to a widespread loss of religious faith as pivotally important to for the emergence of these cultural paradigms, they mostly leave aside questions regarding the truth claims of specific religions in responding to them. Secondly, the scholastic doctrine of the divine ideas is discussed, with a view to presenting an alternative approach to human identity and meaning based on the contention that each human person 'is the result of a thought of God'. Thirdly, the article concludes by drawing out the notions of identity and meaning implied by this doctrine, along with its inextricable relation to a specifically Catholic understanding of God. This understanding includes within it a distinct approach to human sociality in Christ, which answers directly to the individualism of contemporary culture, as outlined by Rieff and Trueman.

Keywords: theology of culture; Pope Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger; divine ideas; Catholic scholasticism; doctrine of creation; theological anthropology

1. Introduction

During a homily preached in April 2005, Pope Benedict XVI said '[e]ach of us is the result of a thought [*pensiero*] of God', for '[e]ach of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary'. Benedict states that 'the purpose of our lives' is to reveal God to others, for human beings are not 'some casual and meaningless product of evolution' (Benedict XVI 2005). Pointing to our ultimate origin as 'a thought of God' is at first glance just a basic assertion of Christian faith. On closer inspection however, it calls to mind a particular locus of Catholic theology, albeit not one usually connected with questions of human identity and meaning: the divine ideas. This is the teaching that God intimately knows all he will create, prior to creating. The doctrine of the divine ideas is a central element for the understanding of creation in Catholic theology, although it has undergone some neglect in recent years (See Levering 2017, p. 30). This article will seek to explore Benedict XVI's hint at a link between the divine ideas and human identity and meaning, with a view to establishing its potential for informing Catholic responses to certain contemporary interpretations of Western culture.

Taking as axiomatic Gaudium et spes' definition of culture as 'the cultivation of the goods and values of human nature' (Vatican Council II 1965), it follows that cultural settings

are characterised by the dominant suppositions about human identity and meaning in those settings.[1] Drawing on the work of two cultural commentators, Philip Rieff and Carl R. Trueman, such dominant suppositions from today's cultural context will be discussed below. Both these commentators point firstly to an acutely personal and individual approach to identity, and secondly to an approach to meaning as the fulfilment and expression of that personal identity. For many, including Trueman, the natural way to respond to these suppositions from a Christian perspective is to focus on the imago Dei as the theological locus for understanding human identity and meaning. While not wanting to detract from the importance of the imago Dei, this article argues that giving attention to the divine idea of the self has much potential to complement it, particularly in terms of responding to those specific features of the contemporary situation highlighted by Rieff and Trueman.

To this end, Section 2 of the article investigates Rieff and Trueman's mapping of modernity and postmodernity's reconfiguring of human self-understanding. Doing so will highlight the apparent promise of the imago Dei as an antidote to the challenges that each of these writers detect, but also point toward opportunities for complementing the image with the divine idea. Section 3 will briefly outline the divine ideas as understood within Catholic tradition, including some common objections that have bearing on understanding the divine idea of the self. Then, the ground will be clear to conclude in Section 4 by drawing out the advantages of rediscovering this element of the tradition to inform the currently dominant notions of human identity and meaning in society at large—showing the benefit for responding to contemporary culture by applying the divine idea of the human self to explain how each of us is the result of a thought of God, and therefore willed, loved, and necessary.

2. 'Psychological Man' and 'Expressive Individualism'

2.1. Identity and Meaning for 'Psychological Man'

I begin with a discussion of the work of Philip Rieff (1922–2006), for whom the contemporary approach to identity and meaning is synonymous with what he calls 'psychological man'. Rieff was an early commentator on a developing cultural hegemony as regards human self-understanding, which he considers the result of Freudian psychology. Rieff is particularly fruitful for this discussion because he incorporates his diagnosis of contemporary personhood into a broader theory as to the nature and purpose of culture itself. He is also exceptional for his time, being a sociologist who assumes the necessity of religion, or the 'sacred', for culture to function properly *as* culture, which will be explained below. Insofar as Rieff considers post-Freudian human self-understanding to have effectively displaced the role of religion, he understands contemporary culture as an 'anti-culture' and not culture as such. (Rieff 2006, p. 13). Put in terms of the Gaudium et spes definition above, for Rieff, culture no longer cultivates the goods and values of human nature, and therefore no longer functions as culture proper.

Rieff presents 'psychological man' as the dominant 'type' of the contemporary human being. Psychological man appears last on a developmental typological scheme that begins in Ancient Greece with 'political man'. In the classical world, says Rieff, 'the health and stability of a person is analogous to—and moreover, dependent upon—the health and stability of the political order'. 'Greek political philosophy' was, therefore, also 'Greek psychology', he claims, for society and selfhood were basically coterminous (Rieff 1990, pp. 3–4). Rieff writes that this type was superseded by 'religious man', most obviously in the European Christendom which Rieff holds adapted 'Greek intellectualism' to Christianity, resulting in a 'Western personality type' that posited faith 'as superior to reason' (Ibid.). Yet society and selfhood remain basically coterminous for 'religious man', it is just that faith is given the prominent role, and the symbolic system at play is the Christian religion. There

is a significant change in the modern period, however, when Rieff's third type, 'economic man', holds sway. This is described as 'one who could rationally cultivate his very own garden, meanwhile solacing himself with the assumption that by thus attending to his own lower needs a general satisfaction of the higher needs would occur' (Ibid.) Here, selfhood and society begin to draw apart but are not separated. The collective needs of society are still a crucial element for human self-understanding and meaning, although they now stand secondary to the 'lower', individual, needs.

Rieff is clear that 'economic man' was swiftly replaced by 'psychological man' during the advent of modernity. During this replacement, individual responsibility for and toward the social order is steadily eroded. Psychological man is described as 'profoundly sceptical of the received hierarchy of values to which even his immediate predecessors assented' (Ibid.). Psychological man 'lives by the ideal of insight—practical, experimental, and leading to the mastery of his own personality' (Ibid.). In short, it is not the polis, a religion, nor economic participation that is now the centre of gravity for human self-understanding; it is one's own sense of self.

Any typology like this, especially so briefly summarised, cannot constitute an exhaustive historical scheme. Nor should it, for, as put by Antonius A.W. Zondervan, Rieff offers 'a theory of ideation, dealing with character ideals that were or are used to form human identities' (Zondervan 2005, p. 46). In the case of psychological man, the most significant factor is the loss of connectedness to both the natural and the social order, resulting in Rieff's distinctive understanding of individualism. In terms of nature, Rieff holds that premodern political and religious ideals involved a set of assumptions about reality, in which '[q]uestions about how to live smoothly passed into descriptions of human nature' and an ethos consisted in offering a total view of reality and ideas'. Then, we read, '"is" and "ought" blended in a natural way' (Rieff 1963, p. 15). For psychological man, by contrast, 'the universe is neither accepted or rejected; it is merely there for our use'. Psychological man is an 'autonomous individual' who 'establishes his freedom to choose from the possibilities' available to him (Zondervan 2005, p. 29). As regards society at large, psychological man tends toward isolation, being the expression of the Freudian contention that 'instinctual desires are "egoistic" by nature' (Ibid., p. 36).[2] Psychological man considers his personal identity to be found in exploring his ego-centred instincts.

This leads in turn to how meaning functions for Rieff's psychological man. The instincts are the primary source of identity, which, by being expressed or released, offer '[i]ndividual autonomy' as 'the highest goal to be attained' (Ibid., p. 49). Autonomy is thus what renders life meaningful. This is not about mere self-direction, but more specifically about disregarding that which restrains or prohibits. In psychological man, the connection between identity/meaning and society is severed. Psychological man finds meaning by seeking 'to wean away the ego from either [an] heroic or a compliant attitude to the community' (Rieff 1979, pp. 329–30). Meaning is found through distancing oneself from social and cultural norms. The 'self is now conceived of as an "authentic core"', and to find meaning the human being must accept that 'social and cultural demands alienate man from this inner core' (Zondervan 2005, p. 52).

Rieff claims that, for political and religious man, such meaning was found through 'modes of willing obedience, or faith, in which he found a sense of wellbeing and, also, his freedom from that single criterion' (Rieff 1987, p. 14). This means that the prior cultural systems brought consolation to one's sense of self in ways that reduced or even eliminated the drive for self-satisfaction. In modernity, the criterion of wellbeing holds sway. Wellbeing is co-extensive with the satisfaction of instinctive desire, and Reiff suggests wellbeing has become a telos of meaning in and of itself. For Reiff, all of this follows from the unshackling

of sets of communal and social expectations like religion, tradition, accepted mores or norms, and so on.

Independently of Rieff's work, wellbeing has indeed become a watchword for approaching 'meaning' in contemporary Western culture (See Williams 2024). He thus seems almost prophetic in having diagnosed this development early on, although he charts his scheme much farther back in the past. He gives particular importance to the emergence of psychological man in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who held that people 'must free themselves from finding attachments to communal purposes in order to express more fully their individualities', and also Marx, who, along with Freud, so critiqued existing social norms that psychological man operates with a marked hermeneutic of suspicion toward them (Zondervan 2005, p. 78). The upshot of this is a marked distrust of what were once held to be authorities, like religion or the polis, so that the individual 'chooses for himself. . .his exemplary authority figures' (Ibid., p. 49). Indeed, the 'highest authority' is then the solitary individual's own 'power of judgement' (Ibid.), the untrammelled exercise of which is thought to guarantee wellbeing itself.

Psychological man is so-called not only because of the ego-centred and therefore psychological frame of reference, but because the very praxis of psychoanalysis is emblematic of its primary characteristics. Rieff argues that 'the psychotherapeutic situation' aptly demonstrates this, involving the separation of the individual from the social dimension insofar as, in the consulting room, 'the individual is temporarily exempted from social demands' (Ibid., p. 77). If the supreme authority is the polis or a religion, by contrast, the loci of transformative moments would surely be communal gathering places, be they legislative or liturgical. It is also important that Rieff describes psychological man as not merely indifferent to religion, but as evincing a consistently 'anti-metaphysical character' as a 'basic motif'. The founding myths of our epoch, says Rieff, are 'scientific myths', which are 'myths of revolt against transcendence . . . designed to free individuals from their psychological thraldom to primal forms' (Rieff 1979, p. 205).

2.2. Rieff's Theory of Culture

I now want to touch on how Rieff presents a distinctive theory of culture, developing directly out of his diagnosis of psychological man. As put by Zondervan, Rieff considers that 'psychoanalysis is not only a thing and a technique, but also a cultural phenomenon with tremendous influence', because 'psychological modes of explanation have become so vastly influential and penetrating that we have been witness to the emergence of a new ideology that now dominates Western culture' (Zondervan 2005, p. 42). While the preoccupation with Freud and Marx is symptomatic of Rieff's situation as a sociologist writing in the mid- to late 20th century, Rieff's presentation of psychological man has clear resonances with Western culture in the 2020s, as seen by the prior discussion of 'wellbeing'. Rieff has proved influential for various cultural commentators in recent years, for whom he has prophetic import for claiming early on that the place once held by revering the social order of human life is now replaced by celebrating 'an exploration of man's erotic capabilities', through cultivating the apparently 'infinite possibilities of the self' (Ibid., p. 9).[3]

The point for his cultural theory is that making the unbridling of Eros into the central coordinate of human identity and meaning is seen by Rieff as an unravelling of culture itself. This can be elucidated by drawing attention to the nuances of Rieff's reading of Freud, especially as regards tensions inherent to the Freudian corpus. Rieff distinguishes Freud the therapist from Freud the theorist, observing a difference when it comes to the unbridling of Eros. As a therapist, Rieff considers Freud to have felt the solution to 'neurosis is for the individual to replace traditional, cultural, religiously based mechanisms of repression'

(Ibid., p. 39). This is the modus operandi of psychological man. As a theorist, Rieff notes that Freud concedes, however, 'that the maintenance of social order and culture demands a degree of repression of instinctual energies' (Ibid.). This second, apparently neglected element of Freud offers the basis for Rieff's theory. He understands culture to be that which maintains social order through fostering the adaptation of instinctive desires into communal goods. Culture is defined by Rieff as 'a design of motives directing the self outward, toward those purposes in which alone the self can be realized and satisfied' (Rieff 1987, p. 4).

Rieff considers culture the distinctively 'human *habitus*', because 'it is typically human to create particular symbolic worlds in our striving for a meaningful life' (Zondervan 2005, p. 6). To approach a meaningful life as the expression of one's 'authentic core' of identity, unshackled by social or collective expectations, cannot constitute 'culture', not only because culture by definition fosters the adaptation of the instincts to those expectations, but also due to the difficulty of establishing a shared 'symbolic world' for our contemporary context. Since Rieff was writing, multiculturalism, globalisation, and digital technologies have arguably exacerbated a state of collective 'symbolic impoverishment' (Ibid., p. 74), where the symbolic systems available are not widely shared within societies, and those on offer are often fragmented, niche, 'recombinational', self-chosen, and self-constructed.[4] The contemporary individual therefore 'has tremendous difficulty in identifying the credible ideals and ideal figures that help give direction to life' (Ibid., p. 7).

Interestingly, Rieff closely links religion and culture. He holds that premodern cultural processes posited a 'sacred order' that 'structured, organised, and maintained the psychological and social order' (Ibid., pp. 68–69). Collective or social expectations were grounded in shared suppositions toward a transcendent ordering. From that primordial ordering, with its 'unseen processes', came forth a 'character ideal' (Rieff 1987, p. 246). For religious man, this was a 'soteriological character ideal': 'the ultimate incarnation of the divine, in Jesus the Saviour, expressed itself time and again as an ideal in the lives of those. . .identifying with Jesus' (Zondervan 2005, p. 70). The primal character ideal was made concrete by the 'cultus', the religious practices by which individuals 'were trained, through ritual action, to express fixed wants, without receiving commensurate gratification' (Ibid., p. 70). Cultus is thus central to culture, properly construed. It makes concrete, available, and efficacious the ultimate character ideal that shows forth a 'sacred order'. Through participation in the cultus, premodern humanity 'internalised a symbolic representation of salvation, which was the basis for emotional stability and social integration' (Ibid., p. 72). There is no such cultus for psychological man. The consulting room has taken its place. Yet, for Rieff, '[c]ulture without cultus' is 'a contradiction in terms' (Rieff 1987, p. 14).

2.3. Identity and Meaning in 'Expressive Individualism'

My second interlocutor is Carl R. Trueman, whose use of the concept of 'expressive individualism' I want to focus on. Expressive individualism describes a tendency very similar to the behaviours of Rieff's psychological man, which Trueman also draws on directly. He takes expressive individualism from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (Taylor 1989). To begin by describing how identity is understood within this tendency, it is necessary to focus first on its individualism. For Taylor, one of the defining features of the changes in human self-understanding in modernity was the emergence of what he calls 'inwardness', or rather, the connection of inwardness with identity, from whence 'the inner psychological life' is seen 'as decisive for who we think we are' (Trueman 2020, p. 22). Identity is individual because it is found 'within' the individual's sense of self. The notion of human identity in expressive individualism thus relates to Rieff's description of an 'authentic core',

although for Trueman, it is not so much about the unconscious, and less directly Freudian thereby; being related to our general 'feelings and desires' (Ibid., p. 45).

Rousseau proves as important for Trueman as he did for Rieff. The former's *Confessions* takes as its subject matter precisely what Taylor calls inwardness, for Rousseau himself describes the 'particular object' of the book as 'my inner self, exactly as it was in every circumstance of my life' (Rousseau 2000, p. 270). Rousseau's basic contention is thus that 'the heart of what constitutes a person is the inner psychological life' (Trueman 2020, p. 105). It almost goes without saying that typical premodern understandings of 'the heart of what constitutes a person' would be located in things like religious belonging, family, or kinship, and therefore inwardness is, in a certain sense, a literal turning within to locate identity, whereas once people turned without. Indeed, Trueman argues that this turning away from others is what constitutes human dignity for Rousseau, individuals 'having an integrity and a value that derives from their inward self-consciousness and not from the society in which they exist' (Ibid., p. 122).

By asking what sort of identity emerges from this inward focus, certain distinctive emphases of Trueman come to light. Trueman's work is concerned with understanding the sexual revolution, from its earliest origins in people like Rousseau and the Romantics all the way to its distinctive expression in the controversies around sex, gender, and sexuality in the identity politics of the 2020s. A focus on 'inward desires' leads, for Trueman, to an understanding of 'identity itself' as 'strongly sexual in nature' (Ibid., p. 52). The key interlocutor for this development is Percy Bysshe Shelley, who 'equates' happiness with the satisfaction of 'sexual love' (Ibid., p. 153). For Trueman's reading of Shelley, the meaning of life is to achieve personal happiness, or 'pleasurable sensation'. This amounts to acquiring 'an inner sense of psychological wellbeing' inextricable from the satisfaction of sexual desire (Ibid., p. 153).

This leads to understanding the function of the word 'expressive' in expressive individualism, and indeed toward the notion of meaning synonymous with it. Expressive individualism is described by Trueman as the contention that 'each of us finds our meaning by giving expression to our own feelings and desires' (Ibid., p. 45). The key point is not just that identity is found inwardly, then, but that meaning is found by expressing the inner sense of self. As put originally by Taylor, this is the endemic assumption that 'each of us has his/her own way of realising our humanity', and, 'it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside' (Taylor 2007, p. 475). Enacting the 'public performance of inward desires' thus renders life meaningful (Trueman 2020, p. 52). Trueman further describes this mindset as one in which 'the individual is most authentic when acting out in public those desires and feelings that characterise his inner psychological life' (Ibid., p. 122). With Shelley, particularly, sexual liberation becomes linked to political liberation, that is, tackling traditional restraints on an individual's sexual expression as things obstructive of individual happiness. Again, thereby, we can see Trueman's concern with the identity politics of the 2020s at work, insofar as attitudes to sex and sexuality are in contemporary culture broadly indistinguishable from political commitments and allegiances.

2.4. Trueman's Responses

It is to Trueman's credit that he engages in the difficult task of thinking prescriptively, and not just descriptively or diagnostically, about the problems he outlines with expressive individualism. On this front, he makes the salient point that the sheer depth and ubiquity of expressive individualism is such that it is unrealistic and naïve to consider that people today might somehow reinhabit premodern suppositions about identity and meaning. As he puts it, 'we are all expressive individuals now, and there is no way we can escape from

this fact'; '[i]t is the essence of the world in which we have to live and of which we are a part' (Ibid., p. 386). Trueman argues from a Christian perspective throughout the book, yet he is candid about how even today's Christianity is expressively individualistic, insofar as anyone living in the West has at least some measure of choice where and with whom they worship, or indeed whether they worship at all. A religious community is highly unlikely to have the assumed, unreflective authority it once did for many. It is therefore difficult to imagine a religion being a locus of identity and meaning without some dimension of individualistic expression being caught up with it (Ibid.).

In responding to this state of affairs, Trueman suggests that expressive individualism is not, in and of itself, an 'unmitigated evil' (Ibid.). This enables him to make a sort-of apologetic move which looks for a point of contact in cultural settings exterior to Christian faith with a view to presenting the faith through that point of contact—making the faith thereby more understandable, or perhaps even seeking the redemption or sanctification of that setting.[5] The point of contact in the case of expressive individualism is for Trueman 'the emphasis it places on the inherent dignity of the individual'. Trueman even goes as far as to suggest that this 'marks a significant improvement on that which it replaced', mentioning 'medieval' and other 'hierarchical' societies in which some human beings were thought to be 'worth more than others because of their position within the social hierarchy' (Ibid., pp. 386–87).

It is at this juncture that Trueman seems to decide that expressive individualism is nonetheless unsuited to offer a point of contact with Christianity. Here, 'one of the problems with the modern political project becomes clear', we read, for expressive individualism might assume our equal worth, but it does not root that contention in the 'idea that all human beings are made in the image of God' (Ibid., p. 387). The imago Dei is thus presented as a corrective to expressive individualism. The image promises to correct the foundational error of that individualism, which locates personal identity in the inner sense of the self and not in the human mirroring of God. An implication attendant to this contention is that meaning is then something encountered on the basis of the imago Dei—presumably suggesting that it is the realisation of God's image 'in' ourselves that renders life meaningful, not the expression of one's inward identity or ego-centred sense of self. If human dignity is the truthful element of expressive individualism, then, Trueman suggests giving that element a proper footing by focusing on our being made in the image of God.

2.5. Observations

I will now present three observations arising from my discussion of Rieff and Trueman, focusing on what the implications of that discussion are for responding theologically to these commentators' diagnoses of contemporary culture. Firstly, we might ask whether 'equal worth' or 'inherent dignity' is the primary feature of expressive individualism and psychological man. For the former, Trueman considers the controversies of contemporary identity politics as emblematic of it, yet some argue that this politics directly undermines the notion of equal dignity, especially if compared to classical liberalism (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020). For the latter, psychological man appears rather amoral and deterministic; it is not that instinctive desires are seen as essentially good or dignified, it is that 'wellbeing' is achieved by satisfying them, and self-satisfaction is the only route to wellbeing, regardless of any moral consideration.

It appears that it is not the *value* of one's inwardness and/or instinctive desires that constitute the primary mark of these elements of contemporary culture, but rather the contention that each human being has a distinctly personal, and indeed unique, identity that pertains to him or her exclusively. While notions of 'autonomy', 'inwardness', and extricating the self from community are of course problematic for Christian theology, it is

also the case that the notion of an acutely personal individual identity has Scriptural warrant, and indeed this warrant could be seen as neglected in exclusively socially orientated approaches to identity, focused only on family or kinship and so on. Most obviously, there is the Psalmist's declaration that 'it was you who formed my inward parts/you knit me together in my mother's womb', and that 'My frame was not hidden from you/when I was being made in secret/intricately woven in the depths of the earth/Your eyes beheld my unformed substance' (Ps 139:13, 15–6). There is Isaiah's contention that 'The Lord called me before I was born/while I was in my mother's womb he named me' (Is 49:1), and his references to God calling human beings 'by name' (e.g., Is 43.1). There is also the New Testament linking of individual identity with Christ, most obviously in the Apostle's statement that 'your life is hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3) and his acutely personal soteriology of 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

A second observation relates to Rieff and Trueman's presentation of the notion of meaning in contemporary culture. Psychological man is a person determined by his or her instinctual drives, and for whom the meaning of existence is to satisfy those desires. The obvious problem here is that the satisfaction of the instincts can only dubiously be considered a fully meaningful category for human life, insofar as Rieff presents those drives as something not subject to self-reflective critique. That is, he presents therapy not as the subjecting of those instincts to discernment and deliberation, but rather just an identification of them with a view to fostering their unquestioned satisfaction. This approach to meaning is, therefore, in keeping with Rieff's definition of contemporary culture as an 'anti-culture', meaning*less* in the specific sense that the instincts are akin to mere biological impulses. What renders biological life meaningful are processes of deliberative self-reflection, the interplay of intelligent consciousness with embodied life, and indeed, for Christianity, movements of the heart, especially love. Such considerations are, if not precluded by psychological man, at least not intrinsic to his or her pursuit of meaning. What is required by way of a Christian theological response is an approach to meaning that therefore incorporates the centrality of wisdom and love into what renders significance in human lives.

With Trueman, the same observation applies, although the accent in Trueman's diagnosis is less on our being determined by the instincts and more on the application of individual will in the pursuit of meaning. That is, the expression of desire, the human being acting out his or her desires according to his or her own personal choices, is primary. Despite this difference of accent, however, the net result is more or less the same—an approach to meaning which threatens meaninglessness, insofar as the only directing criterion for the expression of one's will is whether it pertains to oneself or not, with little or no prudential reflection on whether it should be expressed at all. Similarly, the untethering of sexuality from its intertwining with considerations of love presents a markedly arbitrary approach to meaning, where each will can simply be expressed as each person sees fit, with no overarching criteria for discerning the good or the true. Again, therefore, what is required in response to this is an approach to meaning that incorporates the centrality of wisdom and love into what renders significance in human lives.

A third observation centres on the place of religion in Rieff and Trueman. Starting with Rieff, there are many things in his diagnosis of the contemporary scene that are potentially fruitful for formulating a Christian theological response. Foremost among these is the centrality he gives to religion within his theory of culture, and one of the most interesting and innovative elements of his thought is how he places 'a sacred order' at the heart of any culture that is properly so-called. Rieff was indeed radical for having advocated for 'the inclusion of transcendence in modern social theory' (Zondervan 2005, p. 72), being a sociologist writing in the mid-20th century. Yet, from a theological perspective, it is that

sociological purview that presents certain challenges. That is, for a sociologist, 'religion' is a category for describing particular types of human behaviour across different cultures. For a theologian, there are always questions of the veracity and effectiveness of some specific religion's suppositions about God, the world, and humanity.

For Rieff, '[e]very culture originates in ideas which belong to a sacred order of existence', and culture mediates the 'shaping of profane out of sacred prototypes' (Ibid., p. 5). The purpose of culture, and indeed therefore the purpose of religion itself, is to foster 'emotional stability and social integration' (Ibid., p. 70). Rieff is unconcerned with differentiating between the differently articulated goods of different religions, or indeed different groupings or denominations within those religions.[6] It is 'premodern belief systems' which are discussed in general terms as having been 'formed to curb human expressiveness' (Ibid., 72). That said, Rieff's main points of reference are from his own Jewish background and from Christianity, seen particularly for the latter in his focus on the 'soteriological character ideal' symbolised by Jesus. This is described by him as 'the highest level of controls and remissions' that 'experienced an historical and individualised incarnation' (Rieff 1987, p. 246). But the understanding *of* salvation here is not that of Christian soteriology, for it aims at the 'integration of an individual in a community through integration in a communal social order' (Zondervan 2005, p. 84). While not wanting to detract from the importance of 'emotional stability and social integration' as civic and natural goods, nor indeed to detract from the fruitfulness of Christianity for fostering such goods, they remain civic, natural, or earthly goods, and do not adequately capture the radical transformation by grace that follows from baptism's liberating of the individual from culpability for Original Sin.

By contrast, Trueman writes from a self-consciously Christian perspective, and as such he is aware of the disciplinary orientation of Rieff's work having certain limits when viewed from a theological perspective. He summarises the issue directly by writing that, for Rieff, religion's 'purpose lay not so much in its actual truth value as in its social function in providing transcendent, supernatural authoritative rationale' for the prohibition of certain behaviours (Trueman 2020, pp. 74–75). Trueman's awareness of this point is aptly shown by his recourse to the imago Dei, a distinct conceptuality held to correspond to reality within one religious tradition and not a shared 'premodern' commitment, as such. It is noteworthy, however, that in making this recourse Trueman seems to remain within the 'immanent frame' of the sociologist, for whom religion is a general category referring to social behaviours and not particular revealed realities. He criticises expressive individualism for detaching 'individual dignity' from any 'grounding in *a* sacred order', not the specific understanding of what is sacred that pertains to the Christian religion (Ibid., 387 my emphasis). The issue is not whether a particular understanding of the sacred corresponds to reality and is thereby an antidote to the problems of contemporary life, but rather that there isn't *any* understanding of the sacred that is widely shared. As Trueman writes, modernity 'cuts us off from any agreed-on transcendent metaphysical order by which our culture might justify itself' (Ibid., p. 388). A 'sacred or metaphysical order is necessary for cultures', we read, 'to remain stable and coherent' (Ibid., p. 393).

A properly Christian and indeed Catholic theological response will need to go further than this, entering into the specifics of how the transcendent God as revealed in the witness of the Church presents a distinctive understanding of human identity and meaning. This is not mere triumphalism or tribalism, but rather a highlighting of the need for a theological response to flesh out the details of how to understand the 'sacred order', 'transcendence', or the 'metaphysical', to present a properly theological understanding of identity and meaning. This contention is drawn from Joseph Ratzinger's comments about how it is the 'universal human disposition toward the truth' that should guide intercultural encounters

between Christian and other cultural settings, rather than the sidelining of difficult 'truth claims' as prohibitive of 'seeking union' (Ratzinger 1993).

On the basis of these three observations, I will now inquire into how bringing the divine idea of the self into this discussion will move things forward. The divine idea of the self is, by definition, acutely personal, and acutely personal in a way that perhaps the imago Dei is not, at least as it is commonly approached. The divine ideas have, moreover, been considered as a vital element for understanding creatureliness as subject ultimately neither to deterministic necessity nor arbitrary choice, but rather as presupposing a centrality for wisdom and love. Finally, the doctrine of the divine ideas is inseparable from specific dogmatic commitments, including creation, but also most especially the doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the eternal generation of the Word or Logos. There are good grounds therefore for bringing the divine idea of the self into dialogue with contemporary culture.

3. The Divine Ideas

3.1. Brief Outline

Before giving attention to the divine idea of the self directly, it is necessary briefly to outline the doctrine of the divine ideas and to examine some of its salient features. Scripture teaches that 'God knows each and every particular thing in history, and God knows each thing even if it has not yet taken place in history' (Levering 2017, p. 30).[7] The doctrine of the divine ideas is the primary theological accounting for this knowledge in Catholic tradition, at least from St Augustine until the high-water mark of medieval scholasticism. The core of the doctrine is that, in the Word or Logos, 'in whom God conceives all the infinite reality of God's own existence' he 'simultaneously' conceives 'all the ways in which that infinite existence could be expressed in finite beings' (McIntosh 2021, pp. 20–21). This is a conception of 'everything that can be created', meaning all creatures are known by God before they are made (Levering 2017, p. 37). A common way of describing this knowing is to draw a parallel between human and divine artifice. Just as a human artificer has knowledge of that he wishes to make before making it, so, it is held, does God have knowledge of that which he will create before he creates it.[8] As put by Matthew Levering, 'God could not create things *ex nihilo* if he did not intimately know all that he could create' (Levering 2017, p. 30).

It is common to separate two functions of the divine ideas as they appear in the writings of St Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa*, the ideas serve 'as either the "principles" of God's knowing or the "exemplars" of his creating' (Jordan 1984, p. 17).[9] Mark D. Jordan describes these two functions as 'inseparable' for Aquinas, saying there are ideas for 'everything which God knows, since everything that exists is produced by God according to some productive form' (Ibid., p. 20). The former function—the intelligibility of the world—could be considered 'metaphysical', meaning the ideas are the 'causes of all creatures' (Ibid., pp. 11–12). The latter function, then, whereby the ideas provide a 'productive form', emphasises the ideas as exemplars or archetypes, constituting the very heart of what God intends with conceiving that particular expression of what is not God.[10]

Before going on, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by the word "self" in describing the notion of the divine idea of the self. For present purposes, I am using the word self in a relatively loose sense as analogous to 'person'. I am opting for 'self' rather than person in order to evoke the personal and individual nature of the concept under discussion, to make it clear that I am not suggesting that God has the idea of human personhood in a general sense, but rather has the idea of the uniquely individual self that each person is. Strictly speaking, the word 'self' connects to someone's self-designation of him or herself (or oneself/myself), being the object rather than a subject, or 'I'. The self is one's 'I' as a reflective object. This raises the question of whether I am suggesting that the divine idea of the self includes God's idea of one's own self-understanding, with God conceiving of how

each 'I' conceives of him or herself. The answer to this is affirmative (at least in terms of how the divine ideas are approached below), but the focus of this discussion is not just on this aspect of the self (individual self-understanding), but rather on the entirety of the self, including each self being a distinct subject of experience.[11]

Various challenges for contemporary theological sensibilities arise in relation to the doctrine of divine ideas, and some of these have direct bearing on the divine idea of the self, particularly. These challenges can be grouped together as involving, firstly philosophically-orientated problems, centred on the ontological status of these ideas, and secondly, as involving theological concerns, questioning whether these ideas undermine 'the significance of history' and detract from human and divine freedom (Levering 2017, p. 31). In terms of the divine idea of the self, on both these fronts there is the danger of presenting some more ultimate or 'real' self, existing 'behind', 'above', or 'before' the living embodied self of concrete history, which would severely undermine basic tenets of Christian theology and anthropology.[12]

3.2. Divine Ideas and Philosophy

In his *83 Questions*, St Augustine describes the divine ideas as the 'stable and unmoving forms or reasons' of things ('Formae vel rationis rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, Augustine 1975, p. 71). If Augustine is misunderstood, this description threatens an 'epistemological reification' of the ideas, and I suggest it could threaten an ontological reification as well (Jordan 1984, pp. 21–1). The ideas, reified as 'stable and unmoving forms', then seem roughly equivalent to Platonic ideas. This would mean they were 'universal "forms"' that 'have independent existence in an eternal realm of forms' (Levering 2017, p. 37). A helpful corrective to this threat is offered by Dionysius the Areopagite, who, in *The Divine Names*, emphasised the unique ontological status or 'absolute singularity' of the ideas, calling them 'substantifying reasons' and thereby highlighting that they pre-exist and cannot be considered as independently existing (Jordan 1984, pp. 21–22, cf. Dionysius the Areopagite 1937). Against this background we can understand Aquinas' desire 'to dissociate himself from the Platonic understanding of the Idea' (Ibid., p. 24, see also DeHart 2016; Ross 1991). It is also important to note there is a distinction from Aristotle in the doctrine of divine ideas as well. For what Mark D. Jordan calls 'the Aristotelian model of science', it was held that 'abstractive intelligibility' is precisely the 'intelligibility of individual substances' (Ibid.). The divine ideas cannot be considered substances, insofar as they are uncreated, and their being known by God, which, moreover, means 'abstractive intelligibility' is the incorrect epistemological framework for their intelligibility in any case. That is, for God there is 'neither predication, nor abstraction, nor judgement', so when we say 'idea' in this context we have to do so while maintaining that 'the mode of truth in the human mind is entirely different from the mode of the original truth in divinity' (Ibid., p. 29).

Insofar as the divine ideas are therefore not ideas in either the Platonic or Aristotelian senses, and are indeed ideas that pertain to an 'entirely different' mode of truth to that of human reason, it is clear that the divine ideas are not ideas in any human sense at all. The important thing to bear in mind is that, in providing a rationale for the intelligibility of the world, it is the world's intelligibility to God that is at stake. For Thomas, there is a limit to what can be known by human beings of the ideas. As discussed in the *Liber de causis*, God is 'the sufficient cause of all because of His simplicity', and 'the divine essence is the sufficient and direct exemplar of all created being as particular and particularly disposed' (Ibid.). If the ideas (the cause of 'created being as particular and particularly disposed') are 'substractive views of the divine essence, their full comprehension still requires a reference to the divine essence, along the lines both of essence and existence' (Ibid.). As noted by Jordan, because 'the divine essence is known to itself in a manner which is in principle

inaccessible to unaided human knowing', with the ideas we are dealing with intelligibility "in itself" rather than intelligibility "for us", at least in terms of 'human minds as naturally active' (Ibid.). As they are not within the purview of natural reason, these are ideas that are not philosophically deducible. When it comes to the divine ideas, Thomas holds that 'philosophy may know nature adequately without being able to reach the ground of natural intelligibility at all' (Ibid., p. 32).[13]

3.3. The Divine Ideas and Theology

The concerns that this doctrine detracts from the importance of lived history have been articulated most famously by Vladimir Lossky, in his taking issue with its Western appropriations (Lossky 1973, p. 95). Lossky considers that the Latin tradition of the ideas, particularly in Augustine and Aquinas, enacted a Platonic 'distortion' whereby creatures are held to 'pre-exist' within 'the very being of God' as exemplary causes (Levering 2017, p. 38). He claims that Western theologians present the created world 'under the pale and attenuated aspect of a poor replica of the Godhead' (Lossky 1973, p. 95), meaning that 'the value of history is profoundly compromised' (Levering 2017, p. 38). Matthew Levering has critiqued this view convincingly. He points out that Aquinas does not 'consider that the creation is a poor copy, ontologically speaking, of the divine ideas', because for Aquinas, creatures themselves have a 'finite and participatory' being of 'their own' (Ibid., p. 46). 'In creating', he goes on, 'God gives being to things that do not otherwise have any being whatsoever'. The divine ideas do not have being, and as such, can hardly be said to constitute an ontologically primary domain of reality 'behind', 'above', or 'before' the domain of lived history. Put differently, '[f]inite things are not ontologically fallen away from the divine realm', they are created and as such, 'possess a distinct finite act of being', where there was no such being previously (Ibid., 46).

When it comes to Lossky's view that Latin approaches to the divine ideas restrict God's freedom, Levering is again convincing. He points out that the divine ideas are not to be thought of as 'a mere impersonal data bank upon which God draws', but—pertinent to my discussion in the following section—as 'intimate and personal' (Ibid., p. 42). As Gregory Doolan puts it, the divine ideas 'are not "that by which" God understands all things; rather they are God's understanding of "that which" he understands' (Doolan 2008, p. 102).[14] This knowledge is personal for God and not just with reference to creaturely particularity. Doolan continues, 'although the ideas are many because of their relationships to created things, these relationships are not caused by things but rather by the divine intellect comparing itself with them' (Ibid.). Levering also points out that Aquinas' understanding of eternity entails that 'the divine ideas should not be located "prior" to creation, as though God considered the panorama of his options (the divine ideas) and then implemented some of them' (Levering 2017, p. 43).

There is a final theological problem to discuss here, which arises from the exemplarity of the ideas. This might seem to suggest that the ideas of creatures are perfect archetypes for each creature, and are somehow then separated from or even exempt from God's foreknowledge of creaturely fallenness and sin. On this front, it is important to state that while the ideas as exemplars constitute the very heart of what God intends by conceiving each particular expression of what is not God, this does not preclude God's knowledge of how creatures will fall short of that intention. As put by Levering, 'God's infinite presence' stands 'at the root of all things, even those things that contain a deficit that God permits rather than actively causes' (Ibid., p. 43). Levering takes issue with Hans Urs von Balthasar, for whom falling into sin was a falling away from the divine archetype, claiming that the creature 'is *kept safe* in the archetype' (von Balthasar 2000, pp. 266–67). Levering rightly notes that this would entail universal salvation, in which 'all rational creatures would

necessarily be saved'. By contrast, he writes, Aquinas holds that God has 'ideas of creatures in their imperfection, including in some cases their permanent imperfection' (Levering 2017, p. 48).

As it stands, then, it is not doing justice to the divine idea of the self to consider it as entailing some other more real or indeed more perfect self 'behind', 'above', or 'before' the self as existing in concrete history. The doctrine of the divine ideas does not deny that there is only the created self, while maintaining that this self is the 'result' of a 'thought of God'. The fact this means that each self is loved, willed, and necessary will prove important below, in bringing the divine idea of the human self directly into dialogue with contemporary culture.

4. Responding to Contemporary Culture with the Divine Idea of the Self

4.1. Identity and the Divine Idea of the Self

It was suggested above that a focus on personal uniqueness might offer a point of contact between contemporary culture and Christian theology that complements or advances on a focus on human dignity. For human dignity, the locus classicus is of course the imago Dei. While not wanting to detract anything from the centrality of the image for theological anthropology, it can be suggested that, insofar as the image of God is seen as an attribute of human nature, it does not immediately entail the same acutely personal and unique sense of identity that the divine idea of self does. The image of God is all too easily interpreted as a basic endowment of the human condition, a 'given', even. This is of course not to do justice to the imago Dei, regarding which any sustained engagement with, say, Augustine's triad of memory, understanding, and will, should disclose innately personal elements to each person's imago as it actually functions at the heart of a particular human life (See Augustine 2012).[15] This fact is aptly summarised by the Catechism's discussion of the image, where we read that it teaches that 'the human individual possess the dignity of a *person*, who is not just something, but someone' (§357). Yet the important point remains that to render the concept of the imago Dei personal requires some sustained engagement, self-reflection, and prayer—whereas as a locus of intercultural dialogue it is likely, by contrast, to be perceived as a mere attribute of human nature, and no more immediately personal than, say, being endowed with reason or being embodied. Indeed, both reason and material embodiment are, with reflection, themselves highly personal and individual in each case, but they do not carry this strong and immediate sense of uniqueness with them without a certain degree of intellectual engagement. By contrast, the divine idea of the self is not an endowment at all, for it pre-exists the self, and it cannot easily be interpreted as a 'given' of the human condition insofar as it places nothing between one's existence and non-existence other than God's creative intention.

We can go a step further than this, moreover. The divine idea of the self has more than a merely pragmatic or strategic value for dialogue with contemporary culture. Theologically, it highlights each individual's intensely personal relatedness to God by reminding us that God knows all there is that is to be known about each one of us. It is not by virtue of our being made in the image of God that 'each of us is the result of a thought of God', it is rather that the result of God's thinking of bringing us into existence results in our being made in his image. The divine idea of the self is, in this theological sense, primary over the image. God knows the human creature's identity before creating him or her in his image. Added to this, the divine idea also entails God's foreknowledge of all the events of each individual person's life, including all the movements of each person's heart. It is by virtue of the divine idea that one can say with the Psalmist that 'before ever a word is on my tongue, you know it O Lord', and 'before and behind you besiege me' (Ps. 139:5). Again, the concept of imago Dei as an endowment does not entail, in and of itself, God's intimate

involvement with all the unfathomable complexity of each person's life. As such, the divine idea of the self is a helpful complementary concept to make more vivid the Catechism's contention that the image tells us each person is 'not something, but someone'. To say each of us is 'the result of a thought of God' is to say that all those things undergone by each of us personally are intimately known by the God who called us into being, precisely in the concrete and specific circumstances of each individual life.

4.2. Meaning as Participation with the Divine Idea

To describe the implications of the divine idea of the self for approaching human meaning, it is necessary to draw parallels with the doctrinal locus of the ideas, which is the doctrine of creation. Levering points out that, among the numerous books discussing the doctrine of creation in recent years, there is a marked tendency to focus on God's will (power, omnipotence) and God's goodness (the giftedness of creation, omnibenevolence). Levering notes that this leaves aside the third crucial attribute of God's creative work, his wisdom (Levering 2017, pp. 30–31). He considers the root of this issue to reside in a contemporary unease about the doctrine of divine ideas. Leaving aside God's creative wisdom in the divine ideas means God creates the world through an awkward binary of goodness and/or power. That is, through the overspill of his sheer goodness, which unchecked can lead toward necessary emanationism and maybe even pantheism, and/or by means of his limitless power, which unchecked can lead, conversely, to voluntarism and maybe dualism. The divine ideas are therefore a particularly important tertium quid, as John Hughes argues, for enabling 'Christian theologians to articulate creation *ex nihilo*' while avoiding 'both necessary emanation and arbitrary [divine] choice' (Hughes 2013, p. 137). As describing the intelligibility of the world to God, the divine ideas safeguard the meaningfulness of the world from the perspective of God's wisdom. An exclusive focus on God's goodness threatens a meaninglessness in approaching determinism, whereby God could not *but* create. An exclusive focus on God's power threatens a meaninglessness of arbitrariness, whereby God's inscrutability is applied even to his comprehension of the world.

By applying these coordinates from the understanding of creation to the understanding of the human being, the divine idea of the self can also be seen to apply to questions of human meaning, or the intelligibility to one's self of the human life trajectory. Rieff's psychological man presents a form of human self-understanding which is markedly deterministic. Instinctual desire will always seek satisfaction, and indeed must seek satisfaction even if by means of neurosis. In the context of today's 'anti-culture', meaning is taken as yielding to deterministic, instinctual impulses through discarding the social norms that once restrained them. Trueman's use of expressive individualism is very similar to psychological man, as we have seen, but has more of an accent on the individual will in the acquisition of meaning. That is, meaning is found by each person discovering his or her own way of realising him or herself, and having the strength of will to undertake the 'public performance of inward desires' (Trueman 2020, p. 52). Needless to say, moral evaluation of those desires is not assumed, and expressive individualism entails moreover a distrust of conformity per se as that which might restrain expression. Insofar as neither desire nor conformity is subject to moral evaluation, and the expressive individualist does not ask what it is that might be conformed to, we are presented with a largely arbitrary approach to human self-understanding in which self-will is sacrosanct simply for being one's own.

Focusing on the divine idea of the self, by contrast, promises to reorient this difficult binary which otherwise threatens to lapse into forsaking human meaning through approaching life as deterministic and/or arbitrary. It can do so precisely in the way that the doctrine of the divine ideas functions for the theology of creation, which is to account

for the intelligibility of the world to God. That is, the human relatedness to God's idea of one's self promises an improved self-awareness of the intelligibility of one's life trajectory, of life's meaningfulness. It is important to remember that, while Aquinas presupposed a distinction between intelligibility "in itself" and intelligibility "for us", this distinction applies most starkly for 'human minds as naturally active' (Jordan 1984, p. 29). Relatedness to God's idea of one's self can be considered a fruit of the human mind as 'supernaturally active', which is undergoing graced transformation or 'renewal' (Rom 12:2) through participation in the salvific and sacramental economy. Needless to say this gives a radically different approach to the human pursuit of meaning than those discussed above—being one which depends on the Father's gracious will, Christ's redemptive action, and the Spirit's sanctifying fruitfulness.

4.3. The Divine Idea of the Self and Sociality

The last point leads directly into answering to the significant problems with contemporary culture's individualism by returning to a discussion of religion. Admittedly, accepting contemporary culture's focus on the acutely personal nature of identity will entail a certain individualism. Perhaps Trueman's comments about the unavoidable nature of expressive individualism ring particularly true here. That said, the approach to meaning as a fruit of grace that follows from this should go some way toward correcting that individualism. This approach to meaning firstly makes central the complete dependence of the self on God for the fact of one's existence, indeed one's highly personal, intimately known existence. It secondly, and more importantly, imbues the circumstances of one's life with meaning, rather than approaching meaning as the discarding or unbridling of those circumstances. These circumstances must have other people at their centre, as in family, particularly, and also all the historical contexts of kinship, culture, the neighbour, and so on.

Finally, there is an important point attendant to the proposed focus on the divine idea of the self for dialogue with contemporary culture—and that is its inseparable relationship with the specific dogmatic commitments of the Catholic faith. This is not being presented as necessarily something good-in-itself, but rather as something which directly tackles the serious concerns about individualism raised by Rieff, particularly, but also Trueman. This doctrine entails that, in the Word or Logos, 'God conceives all the infinite reality of God's own existence' while he 'simultaneously' conceives 'all the ways in which that infinite existence could be expressed in finite beings' (McIntosh 2021, pp. 20–21). The divine idea of each self comes forth in the infinite plenitude of God along with the eternal generation of the only-begotten Son. This means, firstly, that human relationality and sociality are profoundly linked with divine relationality and sociality. It is not an isolated picture of God and the self, but an eternal proceeding in which one's self is caught up with all creatures and indeed with the mutual love of the shared divine life of the Trinitarian persons.

This means, secondly, that it is the specific teachings of that Son as the Incarnate Word which provide an authoritative orientation for participating in God's idea of one's self. Far beyond the pursuit of Rieff's 'emotional stability and social integration', those teachings include the profoundly intense sociality that Jesus demands of his disciples, whereby they are called to constitute the Church and live in radical self-sacrifice for others. Indeed, the Scriptural supposition that this life may go even the point of martyrdom, makes clear how unsuited the merely sociological purview is for capturing the distinct type of sociality at stake. A person's death can hardly be thought to achieve his or her emotional stability or social integration, but it can express the truth that a believer's life is 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3). Grounded in divine revelation, inextricable from the dogmatic understanding of the Person of Christ, and imbued thereby with a sense for the supernatural transformation of human lives by grace, the divine idea of the self bears

significant potential for offering a highly appropriate response to certain tendencies of contemporary culture.

Notes

1 See (Phillips 2018, pp. 19–36) for a fuller discussion of *Gaudium et spes*' approach to culture.
2 This article does not inquire into the question of how accurate Rieff's reading of Freud is, which would require a lengthy investigation of each writer's voluminous works and thus divert the discussion from its purpose.
3 As well as being cited often by Trueman (2020), Rieff is cited by Patrick Deneen (2023), and Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn (2021), among many other cultural commentators.
4 The word 'recombinational' is taken from Mark Fisher (2013), who describes postmodernity as involving 'recombinational delirium' (p. 8).
5 These apologetic strategy relates to John Henry Newman's situating of cultural settings exhibiting 'antecedent affinities' with Christian teaching, discussed in (Phillips 2023, p. 2).
6 It should be mentioned that Rieff is deeply embedded in a Judeo-Christian paradigm, as shown by his discussion of Jesus, and references to the Book of Genesis' *tohu wabu*, and the Torah, etc., (see Zondervan 2005).
7 Levering cites Ps 139:16–18, Job 28:24, and Matt 10:29–30 as evidence for this observation.
8 On one level this appears an imperfect analogy because human artifice has imperfect knowledge, and indeed the artistic process is often formative of the thing itself, but this is why the analogy applies in the case of God—as God's creating *ex nihilo* means the process of creating cannot be disclosive of what is being created.
9 See *ST* I, q. 15, a.1., corp.
10 There is a significant and volumous philosophical discussion between those who hold that God has ideas of particulars and those who disagree, rooted ultimately in the Christian reception of Platonism (discussed in Section 2.1) or in Avicenna's claim that God knows 'particulars only in a general way'. For an invaluable overview of the medieval differences of approach see (Vater 2022), and for a discussion of Avicenna see (Adamson 2005). For a recent detailed discussion of Aquinas's approach see (B. R. DeSpain 2022).
11 In this sense, this article is intended to complement, in a constructive fashion, discussion around the degree to which Aquinas did or did not 'elaborate on the ethical and anthropological implications of his position on the divine ideas' (B. DeSpain 2020). That is, I am dealing with the anthropological implications, particularly, it is just that the word 'self' is much more apposite than a derivative of anthropos for its allusion to the introspective and self-reflective aspects of anthropological experience.
12 I have in mind here particularly Dietrich Bonhoeffer's trenchant critiques of the dialectical Barth's alleged splitting of the redeemed and fallen selves as positing a 'heavenly double' (*himmlischer Doppelgänger*) (Bonhoeffer 1996, p. 99).
13 cf. McIntosh 'As God's own "thoughts"...the divine ideas are very rarely construed...to be knowable in and of themselves by human knowers' (McIntosh 2021, p. 13).
14 See *ST* I, q. 15, a. 2, ad 2.
15 A deeply personal construal of the image applies perhaps even more to another of Augustine's triadic models, namely mind, knowledge, and love (*De Trinitate*, 9:4:4), a model which functions through one's knowledge of one's self attaining greater accuracy.

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