Developing a Theology of Personhood: the Case of Dementia

by

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In Loss of Memory[1]

Holy God, you have known me from my mother's womb,
And have been with me throughout my life.
Protect me and keep me safe through all the changes that may come.
Since I am sealed as Christ's own,
help me to trust who I am will never be lost to you.

Amen.

[1] Episcopal Church, *Enriching Our Worship*, Vol. 2, New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2000, p. 77.

Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother Helen Hicks. Words are terribly limited when it comes to capturing the love, inspiration and teaching during the arc of our shared time, especially during the difficult path of her journey into Alzheimer's.

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Preface

> "A chaplain at a large continuum of care community recently reported meeting a local parish clergyperson in the elevator of the facility. Making small talk, the chaplain asked him who he had come to visit and how the visits went. ''Well, I have three members here,'' the pastor replied, ''but two are out of it so I just said hello and left my card.'' Undoubtedly, this pastor will dutifully report to his church council that he made three pastoral calls."[2]

> A hospital doctor is standing at the bedside of an elderly woman with severe Alzheimer's, with her adult children present. He is talking about hospice care with the children. "What are you keeping her alive for?" he asks them, as if she were not awake or not in the room. Then he moves closely towards her face and shouts (she is not hard of hearing), "What do you do for fun, Jane?" She cannot answer but grimaces.

The over-valuing of rationality in Western culture has distorted our view of personhood, especially as applied in the case of dementia.[3] This has contributed detrimentally through stigma associated with the illnesses causing dementia. Our modern attitude stressing rationality over other human attributes gifted by God stems at least in part from earlier Christian theologians and secular philosophers, from Ancient Greece through the Enlightenment and modern eras. What we need is a theology of personhood that takes into account a more balanced view of our Triune God's relation to humans and humans' relation to God and each other. It is not just rationality that makes us human. It is not just intellect that makes us closer to the divine nature. This subject is properly within the subdiscipline of theological

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[2] Susan H. McFadden, Mandy Ingram & Carla Baldauf, "Actions, Feelings, and Values: Foundations of Meaning and Personhood in Dementia," *Journal of Religious Gerontology* (2001) 11:3-4, 67-86.
[3] Stephen G. Post, *The Moral Challenge of Alzheimer Disease*, Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 3.

anthropology – theological reflections on what it means to be human, which is a central topic faced in articulating the Christian faith.

I will be developing a theology of personhood relevant to the case of dementia by closely following David Kelsey's 2009 work *Eccentric Existence*. Whereas the historically predominant Judeo-Christian theological anthropology is mostly derived from Genesis, Kelsey's work draws primarily from the Bible's Wisdom literature. His work provides much of what we are looking for. He argues that personhood is "a status before God" dependent on 1) God's relating to who I am (a vertical orientation) and 2) others' relating to who I am (a horizontal orientation.)

A goal of this thesis is to see the work of Kelsey's theological anthropology in ethics and pastoral care of people with dementia. One aim is to provide a deeper vocabulary about personhood to raise awareness and insights among the faithful and enable them to better cope and advocate if they or a loved one (or a parishioner or a patient) suffers from dementia. A secondary aim is to bring questions from the literature of the practical theology of dementia to set before systematic approaches such as that of Kelsey.

A thumbnail sketch of my argument is provided here:

> 1. The argument in this thesis is that the over-valuing of rationality in Western culture has distorted our view of personhood, especially as applied in the case of dementia. Christian and secular philosophers and theologians, as well as contemporary science, "our local culture," have privileged rationality.
> 2. It is not just rationality that makes us human. It is not just intellect that makes us closer to the divine nature. But we still fall into the Cartesian idea that the rational part, thinking, defines "who am I?" The human brain is more complex than previously thought, and consciousness that arises from it distinguishes us from other animals

> and serves as the source of the properties previously attributed to the soul. Qualities such as emotion, instinct, love and spirituality also make us human.
> 3. We cannot know all the subtleties the person with dementia is experiencing. Some of the qualities may not be diminished even in severe dementia.
> 4. In our society, dementia functions like the "otherness" of disability, and that created by racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity, etc. The illnesses that cause dementia are illnesses of the brain, no more and no less, and we should not stigmatize it.
> 5. David Kelsey's theological anthropology does the work of re-establishing the balance that can include those previously treated as other. The basis for the value and relationship of the human being lies in God, that is, outside the human beings themselves. Kelsey says that personhood is "a status before God" dependent on God's relating to who I am (a vertical orientation) and others' relating to who I am (a horizontal orientation.) God's relating is not lost in dementia or any illness; rather, our ultimate context is that God seeks us more than we seek God. Secondly, the community is accountable to maintain the quotidian identity of the person in the proximate context.
> 6. The lens of science and theology together with stories can help us understand the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of dementia.

Section 1 is a sounding of the association of rationality with the concept of personhood using some sample texts. The first texts are by church fathers Basil the Great (*On the Human Condition*), Gregory of Nyssa (*On the Making of M*an), and Augustine (*The Confessions, The Trinity*). The goal is to give examples of Eastern and Western concepts of the soul and the doctrine of *Imago Dei*. Descartes's work (*Discourse on Method*) was thought to epitomize the dualism of body/mind. This is followed by 20th century unitive interpretations: the work of Karl Barth on personhood (*Church Dogmatics*) and that of Nancey Murphy (*Bodies and Souls? Or Spirited Bodies?*)

Section 2 describes the "modern secular interpretation of humanity (MSIH)" with the help of Wesley Wildman. This is a minimalist synthesis of evolutionary

biology, natural sciences, neuroscience, social sciences and the scientific study of religion. It is not a perfect synthesis but one that is as consistent as possible. Using evolutionary biology, the MSIH addresses the origin of human beings and what makes them unique among species. Using neuroscience, the MSIH attempts to answer questions such as: What physically constitutes the "self"? How and why does the brain generate "qualia" of self-conscious experiences? How do spiritual experiences arise? Wildman claims that the MSIH is neutral towards theology. Atheists use it to argue against religion. Wildman recommends that theologians make their theological anthropology consistent with current scientific knowledge. The MSIH model has a great deal of power in culture despite its lack of complete consistency.

Section 3 begins our theological engagement with David Kelsey. Kelsey is a helpful theological dialogue partner because of the clarity of his thought and because *Eccentric Existence* integrates a great deal of knowledge from many disciplines – theology, anthropology, religion, psychology, ethics and science. His title comes from his central tenet that human beings are what they are because of God relating to them. The result is that the basis for the value and relationship of the human being lies in God, that is, outside the human beings themselves. God is in the center, and human beings are outside the center, i.e. eccentric. This section describes some of the basic tenets of Kelsey's theological anthropology, concentrating on God relating to humans as creator (Part I of *Eccentric Existence*). I first note Kelsey's use of Wisdom literature as source for his theological anthropology, and then discuss the contexts of humans: what Kelsey calls the

proximate and the ultimate. Next I summarize the three ways that Kelsey says God relates to humans: by creating, by drawing to eschatological consummation and by reconciling through Christ. This is followed by how he answers the three questions of modern theological anthropology: What is human nature? How ought we to be? Who am I and who are we? I also summarize how he might answer: "Is personhood identical to being human?" and "Is personhood permanent?" The section concludes with a critique of Kelsey's work.

Section 4: Günter Thomas wrote that "a theological and phenomenologically realistic discussion of the person and of human dignity must touch upon the… 'edges of life.'"[4] This includes cases of high dependence that can mark the beginning and end of life, including dementia as well as disability (physical and mental). It can also include examples of "otherness" such as transgender identity, sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, etc., as well as trans-humanism, that is, the technological enhancing of the human. A brief excursion into the examples of disability and transgender identity provide the opportunity to learn from existing theological literature in these areas, some of which also applies to dementia. Whereas David Kelsey does not engage in depth with these questions, his approach that human identity is grounded eccentrically can provide some insight. Here, we have a better chance to understand the problems of relying on the historically predominant model of personhood, and to see how we might overcome them with a broader (Kelsey's) model. I include Kelsey's arguments about the quality of life and flourishing as a moral category.

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[4] Günter Thomas, "Human Personhood at the Edges of Life: Medical Anthropology and Theology in Dialogue," in *The Depth of the Human Person*, ed. by Michael Welker, MI: Eerdmands, 2014, p. 370.

Section 5 begins with the stories from the beginning of this Preface and how they can be interpreted in the light of the work of this thesis. The case of dementia is briefly described. The problem with anthropology from some Christian and secular philosophers and theologians, as well as contemporary science, "our local culture," is that rationality is privileged. The goal of this section is to work with science and theology together, not to resolve their differences, but to build on the wisdom of each to achieve a more balanced view of personhood, especially in the situation of dementia. Work in this area is encouraged as a way to change attitudes towards dementia, reduce stigma, and support those who advocate for those with dementia. This section concludes with questions for further study.

The over-valuing of rationality in Western culture has distorted our view of personhood, especially as applied in the case of dementia. This has contributed detrimentally through stigma associated with the illnesses causing dementia. Our modern attitude stressing rationality over other human attributes gifted by God stems at least in part from earlier Christian theologians and secular philosophers, from Ancient Greece through the Enlightenment and modern eras. In philosophy, rational foundationalism has more recently been questioned but much of western society is still swayed by the classical views.

Section 1

This section will attempt to explain the association of rationality with the concept of personhood using some sample texts, starting with church fathers Basil the Great (330-379 AD) (*On the Human Condition*), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 AD) (*On the Making of Man*), and Augustine (354-430 AD) (*The Confessions*, *The Trinity*). I will then summarize the issue in Rene Descartes (1596-1650) (*Discourse on the Method*), Karl Barth (1886-1968) (*Church Dogmatics*) and Nancey Murphy (1951-) (*Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*). To begin, it is necessary to understand the Hellenistic concept of soul and the Judeo-Christian doctrine of Imago Dei.

A foundational view about the "soul" among those educated in ancient Athens stemmed from Plato's concept sketched in *The Republic* (Book IV) and *Phaedrus*. Applying three principles about the well-ordered city to an individual, Plato muses about the soul having three principles.[5] He writes, "Then we may fairly assume that they are two, and that they differ from one another; the one with which a man reasons, we may call the rational principle of the soul, the other, with which he loves and hungers and thirsts and feels the flutterings of any other desire, may be termed the irrational or appetitive…? And what of passion or spirit? Is it a third, or

[5] Plato, *The Republic*, transl. by B. Jowett, New York: Modern Library, 1941, sect. 435.

akin to the preceding?"[6] He goes on to argue that passion or spirit is a third distinct principle of the soul, the driving force of courage, perhaps for military glory and the struggle for justice. After establishing these three, he writes, "ought not the rational principle, which is wise, and has the care of the whole soul, to rule, and the passionate or spirited principle to be the subject and ally?"[7] In *Phaedrus*, Plato offers an analogy of the winged charioteer (representing rationality or wisdom) and two winged horses, where one is good and loves nobility and honor and the other is evil and loves appetite or lusts. "With us men, it is a pair of steeds that the charioteer controls; moreover, one of them is noble and good, while the other has the opposite character…Hence the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome."[8] To Plato, all principles of the soul contribute to our harmony and are needed to ascend to heaven, with reason as the driver of the chariot: "when he has bound together the three principles within him…then he proceeds to act."[9]

While the Bible does not offer a definitive explanation of what it means to be human, one of the most enduring Judeo-Christian concepts comes from the creation story in the Hebrew Bible:

> "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of

[6] Plato, *The Republic*, sect. 439.
[7] Plato, *The Republic*, sect. 441.
[8] Plato, *Phaedrus*, transl. by R. Hackforth, Cambridge: University Press, 1952, sect. 246.
[9] Plato, *The Republic*, sect. 443.

> God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:26-27).[10]

This scripture is thought to originate from the "P" or Priestly writings. The Hebrew words for image (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ) and likeness (כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ) are understood to mean "similar to but not the same as" God. The doctrine is called by the Latin "Imago Dei" for Image of God. It has come to signify the special role that humans have in creation, since according to Genesis, no other species enjoys the distinction of being made in God's image.

Many twentieth century Biblical scholars believe that the term "image of God" (selem 'elohim) was taken from Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian culture, which held that kings were representatives of the gods and were made in the image of the gods.[11] By using this phrase, they argue, the Priestly writer seems to imply that God made all of humanity as God's royal representatives on earth. The argument is made more compelling by the juxtaposition of the text "and let them have dominion."

Much theology has been written to try to understand the Imago Dei. Many of the early Church Fathers (300 to 600 AD) generally attributed the Imago Dei in humans to the mind/spirit or soul, which is ranked higher than the body. Our body cannot have the image of God, because God is immaterial and has no body, they reasoned.

A general observation is that in the early theological anthropologies, the authors tend to treat one type of ideal human – probably healthy, young and male,

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[10] All Biblical references are NRSV unless noted.
[11] Kutsko, John F., *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000, p. 60.

although they also discuss femaleness. I did not find writing about humans with physical or mental illness, disability or aging, or who are a sexual minority or transgender, until more contemporary accounts.

1. Basil the Great

For Basil, the "I" is the inner, the rational aspect of the human. He writes, "the outer things are not me but mine…For I am not the hand, but I am the rational part of the soul. And the hand is a limb of the human being. Therefore the body is an instrument of the human being, an instrument of the soul, and the human being is principally the soul in itself."[12]

Of Gen 1:26, Basil first dispels the possibility that God has ears, eyes, a head, hands, and a "behind on which to sit."[13] He writes, "God is without structure and simple…Do not enclose God in bodily concepts… He is intangible, invisible…nor enclosed by time."[14] He writes that our bodies are changeable, and God is not changeable, therefore "according to our image" cannot mean the body, but rather, the "inner human being…the inner part of the soul."[15] He teaches that Gen 1:26-27 refers to creation of the soul.

Basil praises the beauty and complexity of the body, but at the same time he ranks it lower. To drive the point further, Basil says of women that their soul is as perfectly capable as a man's, for in Genesis 1:27 they are clearly made according to

[12] St. Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, Nonna Verna Harrison (transl.), Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005, p.36.
[13] Basil, 34.
[14] Basil, 34.
[15] Basil, 35-36.

God's image the same as men. While Basil also discusses that the woman's body is weaker, this is not of much consequence as far as he is concerned, because the body is much less important than the soul.[16]

Now, as to which principle of the soul, Basil claims that human beings rule over animals by virtue of the "superiority of reason."[17] He goes so far as to say that "the rational part is the human being."[18] According to him, "Let us make the human being *according to* our image" means "let us give him the superiority of reason."[19] (By "us," he believes this refers to the Trinity.) He teaches that the Imago Dei corresponds to the human's rationality.

Basil also analyzes the second creation story, which according to him is the creation of the body: God "formed man from the dust of the ground" (Gen 2:7). He notes that the human being's material aspects are not worth much (dust), but the honor of being taken into God's hands is great: "the human…is nothing because of the material and great through the honor."[20] This allows Basil to expand what it means to be according to the Image. Being human is a balance of humility (from the word humus-of the earth as dust) and royalty. The Image is richer than a simple dualism between body and soul.

Basil reserves the formal title "Image of God" only for Jesus Christ. He emphasizes the centrality of Christ by saying that humans share in the divine image only by using their free will to imitate Christ's incarnate life. Basil writes, "For I have

[16] Basil, 46.
[17] Basil, 35.
[18] Basil, 36.
[19] Basil, 36.
[20] Basil, 50.

that which is according to the image in being a rational being, but I become according to the likeness in becoming Christian."[21] Later theologians such as Karl Barth and David Kelsey will also interpret the Imago Dei Christologically.

2. Gregory of Nyssa

For Basil's brother Gregory, the "I" consists of a "mind…not restricted to any part of the body, but is equally in touch with the whole."[22] This view seems more open to mind-body unity than in the case of Basil. Gregory sees the human as intermediary between heaven, the infinite and "the divine and incorporeal nature,"[23] and earth "the irrational life of brutes."[24] The human "blend(s) the Divine with the earthly…enjoying God by means of his more divine nature, and the good things of the earth by that sense that is akin to them."[25] He writes further that human nature is between "the Divine, the rational and intelligent element, which does not admit the distinction of male and female"[26] and "the irrational, our bodily form and structure, divided into male and female."[27] Rationality is an important factor in designating humans above "the brutes." The soul is dynamic and expands when it is exposed to the infinity of God:

> Indeed, it is for this that intelligent beings came into existence; namely that the riches of the divine blessings should not lie idle. The all-

[21] Basil, 44.
[22] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, in Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc., A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (ed.) William Moore and Henry Wilson (transl.), volume V, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917, XIV.1.
[23] Gregory, XVI.9.
[24] Gregory, XVI.9.
[25] Gregory, II.2.
[26] In Gal 3:28 Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek… there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."
[27] Gregory, XVI.9.

> creating Wisdom fashioned these souls, these receptacles with free wills, as vessels as it were, for this very purpose, that there should be some capacities able to receive his blessings and become continually larger with the inpouring of the stream.[28]

Kathryn Tanner interprets this passage, "For the infinite being and goodness of God to come within them, they must have the capacity to expand in their own created goodness without end."[29]

Quoting 1Thess 5:23 "may your *spirit and soul and body* be kept sound" (italics mine), Gregory sees human nature as three-fold, a model called trichotomism. He names the "more corporeal existence heart, the intermediate soul, and the higher nature, the intellectual and mental faculty 'mind.'"[30] Mind has the Imago Dei, the "likeness of the Creator," but its nature evades us, "figuring by its own unknowableness the incomprehensible Nature."[31] Gregory asks the question how does the mind interact with the body? He writes, "the mind approaching our nature in some inexplicable and incomprehensible way, and coming into contact with it, is to be regarded as both in it and around it, neither implanted in it nor enfolded with it, but in a way which we cannot speak or think."[32] This question continues to puzzle dualists today.

Continuing with the notion that we are dynamic beings, with our bodies developing from birth to maturity, Gregory writes: "as the body proceeds from a

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[28] Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," quoted in Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 38.
[29] Tanner, 38.
[30] Gregory, VIII.5.
[31] Gregory, XI.4.
[32] Gregory, XV.3.

very small original to the perfect state, so also the operation of the soul…"[33] What does he mean by "the perfect state" of the body? the peak of life? Gregory does not specify. Importantly he suggests that the Imago Dei is also dynamic, growing through contemplation. We have to go through steps to fully realize the Imago in us.

Gregory writes that humans are like God insofar as they are able to express "purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, alienation from all evil, and all those attributes of the like kind which help to form in men the likeness of God."[34] Love is an important element in the image: he writes, "The fashioner of our nature has made this to be our feature too."

Gregory also warns that sin can degrade (but not totally destroy) the Imago. He writes that "Jechoniah, say, … has obliterated the beauty of his nature by the pollution of wickedness, yet in Moses and in men like him the form of the image was kept pure. Now where the beauty of the form has not been obscured, there is made plain the faithfulness of the saying that man is an image of God."[35]

Michelle Gonzalez notices a foreshadowing of a modern interpretation of Imago Dei in Gregory's work: "Image is understood in Gregory's theology as a *relationship* between God and humanity, where we grow in likeness to Christ. Love is what constitutes the image of God in humanity, and through desire in faith this love grows."[36] The emphases on Christ and relationship continue in the work of Karl Barth.

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[33] Gregory, XXIX.8.
[34] Gregory V. 1.
[35] Gregory, XVIII.8.
[36] Michelle Gonzalez, *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology*. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2007, p. 33.

3. Augustine

Augustine was enormously influential in the West. It is known that he tried out various accounts in his writings, some of which appear to self-contradict, but there are some consistent threads in his anthropology. Augustine strengthens the Neoplatonic aspects of the Eastern fathers' teachings on human beings. In his *Confessions*, he contemplates the mystery of his own heart as well as what relationship is possible between God and human. He admits that humans cannot know themselves fully (as is born out in Freud's work and modern neuroscience which acknowledge the conscious and unconscious), whereas God knows all because he made us.[37] Augustine generally espouses that the soul is the core of the human being. In the *Confessions*, he writes, "'who are you?' And I answered my own question: 'a man.' See, here are the body and soul that make up myself, the one outward the other inward."[38] In the *Trinity*, he teaches that the outer man is what we have in common with the animals, except that we have an upright posture.[39] In *On Genesis*, he writes that the soul is more important than the body: "the soul by the very worth of its nature surpasses every bodily creature."[40] Further, the most important part of the soul is the inner man or mind.

In the *Trinity*, Augustine tries out a picture in which the mind is one thing but has two functions – the higher part contemplates eternal truths and makes

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[37] Augustine, *The Confessions*, Maria Boulding (transl.), The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, John E. Rotelle (ed.), Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 1997, p. 241.
[38] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 43.
[39] Augustine, *The Trinity*, Edmund Hill (transl.), The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, John E. Rotelle (ed.), Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 1991, p. 322.
[40] Augustine, *On Genesis*, Edmund Hill (transl.), The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, John E. Rotelle (ed.), Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 2002, 335.

judgments.[41] He posits this part of humans as the image of God.[42] The lower part is concerned with the management of temporal and material affairs. Both parts of the mind are rational. Augustine continues, "we see humankind, made in your image and likeness, set over all these irrational living creatures in virtue of this same image and likeness to you, which resides *in its reason and intelligence*."[43] Augustine's apparent preference is for the higher part of the mind because he believes that the goal of human existence is to contemplate God to achieve the consummation of the soul. This consummation is "when the soul subsumes the body entirely, the body no longer being even a temporarily non-mental, partial concern of the mind, but playing its ultimately proper part in the mind's contemplation."[44]

In reviewing the wonders of memory in the *Confessions*, Augustine comes to the conclusion that it is "the mind, and this is nothing other than my very self."[45] The person who remembers is myself, or in other words, I am my mind. Descartes later develops this idea. Here again Augustine points out that even memory is not an end but rather a means. He writes in the *Confessions*, "I will pass beyond this faculty of mine called memory, I will pass beyond it and continue resolutely to you… See, I am climbing through my mind to you… I will pass beyond even this faculty of mine which is called memory in my longing to … cleave to you in the way in which holding fast to you is possible."[46]

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[41] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 322.
[42] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 324.
[43] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 377 (italics mine).
[44] Burnell, Peter, *The Augustinian Person*, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005, p. 41.
[45] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 254.
[46] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 254.

Augustine presents a more nuanced view of human psychology when he searches for an analogy of the Trinity. Humans are made in the image of God, that is, in the image of the Trinity, therefore there must be a threefold nature in us. Among several models he explores in his work *The Trinity* is memory of self, understanding of self and willing of self.[47] So for example we need memory to come to understanding, we need understanding to make sense of memory, we need will to come to understanding, and we need memory to make future plans according to our will. He writes, "These three, then, memory, understanding and will, are not three lives but one life, nor three minds but one mind."[48] It serves for an analogy of the Trinity, but also broadens Augustine's thoughts about the mind as encompassing more than rationality, since it can be argued that human memory, understanding and will are not always rational.

In *The Trinity*, Augustine suggests that the Imago Dei in us was so damaged in the fall that, even with Christ's sacrifice, we can never restore the image in this life. In 1 Cor 13:12 Paul writes, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." In *The Trinity*, Augustine explains, "What we have been trying to do is somehow to see him by whom we were made by means of this image which we ourselves are, as through a mirror."[49] Of what humans must do to restore the image, he continues:

> So then the man who is being renewed in the recognition of God and in justice and holiness of faith by making progress day by day, is

[47] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 298.
[48] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 298.
[49] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 405.

> transferring his love from temporal things to eternal, from visible to intelligible, from carnal to spiritual things; he is industriously applying himself to checking and lessening his greed for the one sort and binding himself with chastity to the other. But his success in this depends on divine assistance.[50]

After this spiritual work, finally, "the image which is being renewed …inwardly from day to day… will be perfected in the vision that then will be face to face after the judgment..."[51]

At the same time, Augustine assures us in *The Trinity* that we are being transformed and that "even the blurred one is the image of God, and if image, then of course glory."[52] Augustine does not discuss it, but this is an interesting concept in the case of dementia. Considering how far is the scale between God and humans, the "blurred" image that is the healthy human is not that much more "blurred" with the mental deterioration of dementia.

4. René Descartes

René Descartes re-scripted western philosophy just prior to the Enlightenment by introducing foundationalism, which asserts that it is possible to identify certain truths as foundations for human knowledge. In *The Discourse on Method* he tells of sitting still with only his mind and senses. He attempted "to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly

[50] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 389.
[51] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 391.
[52] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 406.

that I could have no occasion to doubt it."[53] His senses, memories and abstract thinking could deceive him, and so he doubts them. He writes,

> I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the 'I' who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth 'I think therefore I am' was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.[54]

He came to rely on the fact that he is the one who is thinking and he concludes, "I think therefore I am." The rational part, thinking, defines the human person.

Descartes is known for endorsing substance dualism between body and mind, a model that some still hold today. This entails a radical separation of body and mind as distinct substances. Substances are defined as having different properties. Bodies have extension, that is, they take up space, have mass and dimensions. Matter is uniform for him; animals are extended things, not thinking, and so are no different from a rock. Thought or mind, on the other hand, takes up no space.

The Cartesian separation of body and mind is notoriously difficult to defend, since the body obviously sends signals to the mind, and the mind causes the body to move. How do they do this if they are different substances? This remains a problem for dualists even today. Like Gregory of Nyssa, Descartes had a difficult time explaining how body and mind are connected. As a philosopher scientist, Descartes dissected animal brains to inform his study. He thought the pineal gland, being the

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[53] René Descartes, "The Discourse on Method," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, (transl.) Cambridge: University Press, 1967, p. 92.
[54] Descartes, *Discourse*, 101.

only unpaired brain structure, must be the linkage between the body and mind. This hypothesis has been shown by modern neuroscience to be false.

In the western tradition that already elevated the mind over the body, with Descartes, the rational became even more superior and the body more animalistic and undervalued. According to him, the body is nothing more than a hydraulic machine. Descartes identified the soul with the mind. In reply to a critic Gasendi, he writes, " For I consider the mind not part of the soul but as the whole of that soul which thinks."[55] He continued the Augustinian teaching that the human soul is immortal and separable from the body: "that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is."[56] In fact, he says, God and soul, the immaterial, are better known than bodies, the material.

This separation of body and soul, continuing in the Platonic tradition, helps Christians imagine how they may be resurrected in the afterlife. One belief still held by some is that one's soul continues even while one's earthly body dies and decays. The soul departs to be with God and at the end of time, the soul is clothed with a resurrected body.

Desmonde Clarke proposes that Descartes' dualism was a less-than successful attempt at an "expression of the extent of the theoretical gap between a science matter in motion, within the conceptual limits of Cartesian physics, and the descriptions of mental lives that we formulate from the first-person perspective of

[55] Descartes, *Author's Letter*, in Haldane, 210.
[56] Descartes, *Discourse*, 101.

our own thinking."[57,58] Understanding how the brain-mind acts within the laws of physics and yet also gives us a subjective experience remains a major challenge today. Whatever new insights about Descartes' work, it nonetheless influenced those following him with the idea that the body and mind are radically separate. The body-mind proposition is disputed in modern day reductionist materialism that characterizes neuroscience, which holds that the mind is nothing more than the brain. This is a unitive view, since there is only body.

The emphasis on rationality as the main criterion characterizing personhood continued throughout the Enlightenment in the 18th century and there were no writings about Imago Dei for a time. Today there still are dualists, but more recently evolved interpretations of personhood assume a unitive (or monist) view of human nature.

5. Karl Barth

As one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, Karl Barth emphasizes the fundamental belief in God's revelation in Christ and scripture, rather than the growing liberal Protestant trend at the time of an increased reliance on our own experience to define the relationship between God and humans. His basic belief is that all humanity is saved by the work of Jesus Christ, and only in Christ do we know God. Unlike the Calvinist view, he does not believe that individuals are

[57] Desmond Clarke, *Descartes's Theory of Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005, p. 258.
[58] Desmond Clarke thinks that Descartes may not have intended substance dualism in the exaggerated way attributed to him (p. 258). He states that Descartes' philosophical work, which endures today, must be taken in the context of his scientific work (which today is outdated, only of historical interest.) Further, Clarke feels that Descartes' theological statements were made under pressure from the Lateran Council, which condemned a belief that the soul dies when the individual dies, and pressed for theological proof (p. 5).

selected for salvation, but rather that Christ accomplished salvation for all of humanity. Our response is to acknowledge and have faith, which are gifts of God. Yet there is distance still between God and humans, and the only nonprideful approach is to assent to Christ.[59] Barth would not like the implied intimacy of the concept of Imago Dei espoused by Gregory for example, where humans grow closer to God through contemplation and love by virtue of the shared likeness. For individuals to want more intimacy with God, bypassing revelation and apart from Christ, is to be proud and disobedient.

Barth's work on personhood is a unitive interpretation. He argues that the human is "soul and body totally and simultaneously, in indissoluble differentiation, inseparable unity and indestructible order."[60] The human is "bodily soul, as he is also besouled body."[61] By soul, he does not mean the Augustinian sort that exists and "had a being…outside his body and then entered it as its life…and finally left it without losing this being and existence."[62] Rather, body and soul cannot exist without one another.

> Barth's concept of Imago Dei is first of all deeply rooted in Jesus Christ.
>
> > If this One is their Savior and Deliverer - He whose humanity is to take their place and give His life for them - and if as such He is the creaturely image of God Himself, how can they be creatures which completely lack this image, which do not at least prefigure and indicate it, when they are creatures of the same God and determined as such for covenant-partnership with him?[63]

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[59] Dominic Robinson, *Understanding the "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, Von Balthasar and Moltmann*, Farnham, England: Asgate, 2010, p. 32.
[60] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, GW Bromily and Thomas Torrance, eds., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-1975, Vol. III., part 2, Doctrine of Creation 2, p. 417.
[61] Barth, Vol. III, part 2, 350.
[62] Barth, Vol. III, part 2, 350.
[63] Barth, Vol. III, part 2, 225.

Barth reorients the Imago Dei in God's action in Christ, keeping with his overall systematic theology. Secondly, Barth is willing to render the Imago Dei communal rather than individual. Later, David Kelsey is influenced by this strong move against individualism. Barth writes,

> Humanity, the characteristic and essential mode of man's being, is in its roots fellow-humanity. Humanity which is not fellow-humanity is inhumanity. For it cannot reflect but only contradict the determination of man to be God's covenant partner, nor can the God who is no *Deus solitarius* but *Deus triunus*, God in relationship, be mirrored in a *homo solitarius*. As God offers man humanity and therefore freedom in fellowship, God summons him to prove and express himself as the image of God - for as such He has created him.[64]

Here, human dignity is elevated. It makes sense that humans must love other humans, as each is an expression of the Imago. Barth explicitly rejects that the Imago Dei is the human's capacity for rational thought when he critiques those who espoused this idea: they "pursued all kinds of arbitrarily invented interpretations of the Imago Dei… Is it that the expositors were too tied to an anthropology which expected the description of a being the divine likeness to take the form of a full description of the being of man, its structure, disposition, capacities, etc….?[65]

Further, a central idea in Barth's theology is that God seeks us more than we seek God.

> God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us. He does not have to do it, because in Himself without us, and therefore without this, He has that which He seeks and creates between Himself and us. We must certainly regard this overflow as itself matching His essence, belonging to his essence. But it is an overflow which is not demanded or presupposed by any

[64] Barth, Vol. III, part 4, 117.
[65] Barth, Vol. III., part 1, 195.

> necessity, constraint, or obligation, least of all from outside, from our side, or by any law by which God Himself is bound and obliged.[66]

Thus, our recognition by God as a person depends less upon our own particular state, since God seeks and creates fellowship with us. This is reassuring in the case of mental deterioration such as in dementia, because our tie with God does not depend entirely on our own selves and minds, as we in the Western individualistic culture are prone to think.

Barth writes that it is not possible for humans to lose their constitution:

> Since his constitution derives from this God, from Him who is faithful and does not repent of His goodness, it is therefore unshakeable. It can, of course, be disturbed and perverted by human sin, but it cannot be destroyed or rendered nugatory. Hence man remains man even in his deepest fall, even in the last judgment of death; and even in death he is still man within the hand and power of God. In no case, therefore, does He become another being, a being which is deprived of the promise of the covenant of grace and cannot even in death and hell appeal to the covenant…From the (constitution of man's) origin from God, like the being of man as man and woman, it has an inner relation to God's turning towards man and to the salvation which God intends for him; for man cannot be what he is, soul and body in ordered unity, without representing in himself – long before he understands it, and even when he will not understand it – the good intention of God towards him, without himself being guarantor for this good intention of God.[67]

6. Nancey Murphy

In *Bodies and Souls? Or Spirited Bodies?* Nancey Murphy argues for a model of the human that is dependent on the physical, but also is not reductive. Her reasoning is as follows. First, she points out the success of modern neuroscience in

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[66] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, GW Bromily and Thomas Torrance, eds., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-2004, Vol. II, part 1, The Doctrine of God, p. 273.
[67] Barth, Vol. III, part 2, 347.

explaining bodily and mental phenomena through physicalism, a model in which nothing immaterial needs to be involved. The human is composed of only one part (the body). The mind is constituted by electrochemical signals generated in the brain and nervous system, involving movement of physical things - molecules and electrically charged ions in the body. Murphy writes, "all of the human capacities once attributed to the mind or soul are now being fruitfully studied as brain processes – or, more accurately, I should say, processes involving the brain, the rest of the nervous systems and other bodily systems, all interacting with the socio-cultural world."[68] Capacities historically attributed to the mind or soul include reason, intellect, cognition, moral insight, emotional impulses, courage, and self-restraint. Murphy is a physicalist and not a dualist. Where she differs from the completely atheistic reductionistic view is that she believes in the triune God. Wesley Wildman criticizes Murphy's position as a bifurcation (physicalism and theism) with no coherent linkage.[69]

Murphy warns against reductionism, which holds that humans are physical organisms and "nothing but," made of atoms behaving according to physical laws. As long as the physicalist is nonreductive, all the functions previously attributed to the soul including free will and moral responsibility "depend on the body *in its relation to the world, to culture and to God*."[70] We are "imbued with the legacy of thousands of years of culture, and most importantly, blown by the Breath of God's Spirit; we

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[68] Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls? Or Spirited Bodies?* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 56.
[69] Wesley Wildman, "Spirituality and the Brain: A Scientific Approach to Religious Experience," 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHe2oqugSns\ viewed March 2017.
[70] Murphy, 72. (italics mine)

are *Spirited bodies*."[71] Humans are distinct from animals in "morality and the ability to be in relationship with God."[72] We have the capacity for religious experiences by virtue of culture and our complex neural systems (both given to us by God).[73] Our identity is preserved over time through "consciousness, memory, moral character, interpersonal relationships and especially our relationship with God."[74] She believes in the resurrection of the body rather than in the immortality of the soul. At resurrection, she suggests, rather than a re-clothing of the soul with a new body, it is a restoring of the whole person to life.[75]

Murphy points out one of the consequences of Christianity assuming the soul/body dualism for almost two millennia is that the tradition has over-emphasized the individual as an isolated unit: the real self (soul, mind, ego) contained in the body. Thus, the Church became more concerned with the religious and metaphysical – the saving of the soul - rather than the socio-political and ethical characteristic of early Christianity.[76] The more widespread adoption of nonreductive physicalism might cause a shift from our emphasis on individuals and rationality. In our current culture that over-values rationality, if a person's rationality is compromised through dementia, their value as a person becomes inherently reduced. Rather, if they are viewed as part of the household, as in the original Hebrew tradition, they maintain their standing in the "psychical whole."[77]

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[71] Murphy, ix.
[72] Murphy, 111.
[73] Murphy, 5.
[74] Murphy, 6.
[75] Murphy, 23.
[76] Murphy, 24.
[77] Aubrey Johnson, *The One and the Many in Israelite Concept of God*, quoted in Murphy, 24.

7. Coda

To summarize, the concept of soul that was embedded in Hellenistic thought caught hold in Christianity through the work of the early Church fathers. Soul became associated with rationality and was elevated over the body. The concept of the immortal soul is useful for understanding how humans connect with their identity after the body has died at their resurrection like that of Christ. It is useful for signifying how humans are different from animals, how humans are unique with respect to each other, and how a human maintains an identity over a lifetime despite many physical and mental changes. Several Church fathers equated soul with mind, and then Descartes firmly separated mind from body in substance dualism. To Basil, the body was an instrument of the soul. To Descartes, the body was a hydraulic machine. The Enlightenment proclaimed rationality as the defining concept of being human. Reductionist physicalism, the predominant view of secular scientists and philosophers today, continues this tradition holding that humans are constituted by one part, their body, being governed only by physical laws. To them, human beings are "nothing but" atomistic materials, albeit with highly complex brains. As we shall see in the next chapter, this view often privileges rationality along with other higher cognitive functions such as language as the defining concepts separating humans from higher animals.

Similarly, interpretations of the Judeo-Christian concept of Imago Dei from Basil to Augustine elevated the rational, because the image that humans reflected of God was attributed to the human intellect or soul. Gregory and Augustine referred to a damaged image due to sin and the Fall.

More recent unitive views of the human by Barth and Murphy anticipate the more balanced view that we seek in order to understand the concept of personhood as applied in the case of dementia. Barth's view of the Imago Dei links it to the covenant partnership between God and humans, not to particular capacities of humans like rationality. It is communal in reflection of the Trinity (three-ness of God.) Barth discusses the human being in terms of "soul and body in ordered unity," where his use of the term soul affirms the orthodox vernacular. Barth does not mean the same thing as the Augustinian soul, but rather that the body is not wholly material. Murphy takes this unitive view one step further, claiming that humans have only a material body and no soul, and the aspects previously attributed to soul emerge from the complex nervous system. Yet humans are still created and in the presence of the triune God, with resurrection of the body rather than an immortal soul.

This discussion continues by looking more deeply at the modern secular model for the human in Section 2, and then through the study of the theological anthropology of David Kelsey starting in Section 3.

Section 2 describes the "modern secular interpretation of humanity (MSIH)" with the help of Wesley Wildman. This is a minimalist synthesis of evolutionary biology, natural sciences, neuroscience, social sciences and the scientific study of religion. It is not a perfect synthesis but one that is as consistent as possible. Using evolutionary biology, the MSIH addresses the origin of human beings and what makes them unique among species. Using neuroscience, the MSIH attempts to answer questions such as: What physically constitutes the "self"? How and why does the brain generate "qualia" of self-conscious experiences? How do spiritual experiences arise? Wildman claims that the MSIH is neutral towards theology. It has been used by atheists to argue against religion. Wildman recommends that theologians make their theological anthropology consistent with current scientific knowledge. The MSIH model has a great deal of power in culture despite its lack of complete consistency.

Section 2

In continuing our discussion about what lies at the core of personhood, we cannot ignore the voices of the sciences, what could be called our "host culture," which can serve as a foil to the theology as well as a source material for it. Wesley Wildman describes a model he calls the *"modern secular interpretation of humanity (MSIH)."*[78] It is a secular "large-scale interpretation of human beings that transcends any one scientific, social-scientific or humanities discipline and yet is shared currency of thought for most thinkers in all of these disciplines."[79] It attempts to synthesize various disciplinary views of the human being, including evolutionary biology, natural sciences, neuroscience, philosophy, social sciences and the scientific study of religion. While the model is constructed to be "neutral towards theology," Wildman calls upon theologians to seek to coordinate with insights of the MSIH.[80] He does not define the model in depth, rather he sketches out the disciplines and leaves it to the reader to use updates from the fields, many of which change rapidly.

[78] Wesley Wildman, "A Theological Challenge: Coordinating Biological, Social, and Religious Visions of Humanity," *Zygon*, vol. 33, no. 4 (December 1998), 571-597.
[79] Wildman, 572.
[80] Wildman, 575.

The MSIH model assumes that there is a hierarchy of disciplines, and that "a higher level explanation is really nothing more than a massively simplified version of a lower level explanation.[81] In other words, the assumption is that there are no in-principle gaps between any two levels in a hierarchy of disciplines such as Figure 1.

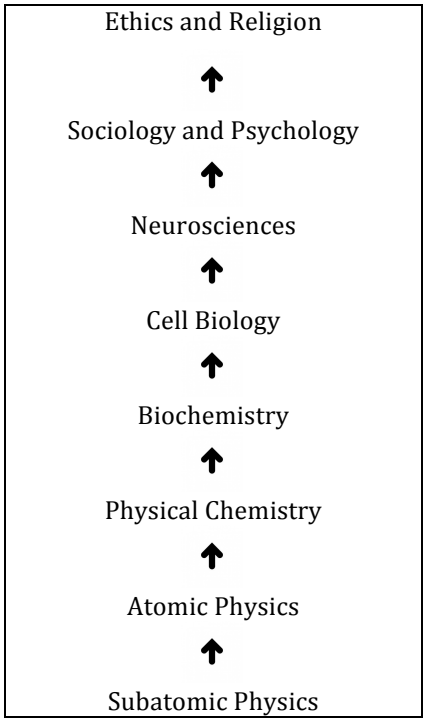

Figure 1: MSIH on the Relations between the Sciences[82]

For example, neuroscience cannot now account for personality and the qualia of self-conscious experience, but Wildman states that most scientists believe that these explanations will one day be possible given the sufficiently complex central nervous system.[83] Previously, philosophers might have addressed these questions using the term soul, a nonphysical yet individual locus of human personhood. If there is a soul, Wildman asks, how did it get there – at what point in human evolution and at what

[81] Wildman, 584.
[82] Wildman, 583.
[83] Wildman, 579.

point during human development from an embryo? The MSIH leans towards the physicalist view that there will be a variety of lower level explanations rather than the higher-level description of soul.

What does the MSIH have to say about the origin and uniqueness of the human species? Evolutionary biology holds that humans are a product of ongoing processes regulated by natural laws and open to chance. Biologists hold that these processes are driven by random variations in the genetic makeup of the organism, competition for resources, natural selection and genetic transmission. They propose that there are also advantages conferred to kin groups through cooperation and altruism. The implication of the MSIH is that in the future, humans will be superseded by better-adapted species. One question about evolutionary theory is whether there have been enough cycles to achieve the astounding complexity of the human brain, for example.

Evolutionary scientists estimate that hominids and chimpanzees evolved from a common ancestor c. 5 to 7 million years ago.[84] One of the lines of these early hominids was Australopithecus (with a brain volume 400-550 milliliters (ml), about the same as a modern chimpanzee)[85], and the genus *Homo* evolved from Australopithecus c. 1.9 million years ago (with brain volume about 600 ml). Agustín Fuentes argues that the reason was not bipedalism (occurred 6 million years ago), nor making tools (occurred 3 million years ago), nor hunting, but rather a combination of reasons having to do with the unique manner in which humans

[84] Francisco Ayala, "Human Nature: One Evolutionist's View," *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy and H. Newton Malony (eds.), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 33.
[85] John Hawks, "How has the human brain evolved over the years?" *Scientific American*, 24 (3) (2013).

creatively cooperate to avoid predation, make and use tools, use fire, raise children, and care for others, even outside kin groups.[86] Of the many species in the genus *Homo*, the MSIH claims that modern humans, *Homo sapiens sapiens* emerged c. 200,000 years ago, with the enormously enhanced brain volume about 1200 ml, approximately the size of human brains today. After Neanderthals became extinct about 40,000 years ago, it is thought that the early *Homo sapiens* became the only *Homo* species. It is extremely unusual to have only one lineage in a genus survive.[87] Fuentes notes that the ability of humans to create symbols and acquire religiosity coincided with the emergence of the species.

> The emergence and increasing use of symbolic representation in the human lineage over the last 200,000 to 400,000 years represent a significant expansion and reworking of the human niche. Scientists (including myself) have argued that this reflects the full-blown development of the distinctive human socio-cognitive niche… and is thus a critical moment in the appearance of what we would call the "modern" human (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) in a cognitive sense as well as a morphological one. [88]

What makes humans unique among all species? The MSIH would say that it was the surging size of the brain c. 200,000 years ago that marked the transition to human beings that were largely like us today. Jeannette Norden articulates the common belief among neuroscientists that "the brain is the biological substrate of the mind."[89] She cites the more recently evolved brain substructure, the outer rim of

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[86] Agustín Fuentes, "Advancing Together: Cooperation and Creativity in Human Evolution," Dialog on Science, Ethics and Religion, American Association for the Advancement of Science, December 7, 2016.
[87] Fuentes AAAS
[88] Agustín Fuentes, "Niche Construction and Religious Evolution," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
[89] Jeannette Norden, *The Human Brain*, Learning Company, 2007, p. 1.

the telencephalon (comprised of the cerebral cortex and the corpus collosum which connects the left and right hemispheres), as the seat of the human mind.[90]

The three pound human brain is much more complex than previously thought. A recent estimate of its size is 100 billion brain cells (neurons) and 40 quadrillion synaptic connections, making one human brain potentially more powerful than the World Wide Web.[91] Whereas a mouse brain is 40% cerebral cortex, a human brain is 80%.[92] Further, it is not just the physical structures that give it capacity, but the array of neurotransmitters and information molecules that function at receptors throughout the body. Neuropsycho-immunologists Candace Pert and Michael Ruff termed this "a network of communication between brain and body"[93] or colloquially, "liquid brain," which extends throughout the body.[94] The MSIH attributes the large size of the human cerebral cortex as key to the distinction between human beings and other species. There is no doubt that in the future we will have a greatly increased understanding of the differences between human and nonhuman primates with the improvements in imaging and techniques for mapping the brain.[95]

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[90] Norden, 8.
[91] Thomas Bartol et al., "Nanoconnectomic upper bound on the variability of synaptic plasticity," eLife 2015;4:e10778.
[92] Michel Hofman, Evolution of the human brain: when bigger is better, *Frontiers in Neuroanatomy* (2014) 8:15.
[93] Candace Pert, Michael Ruff, Richard Weber and Miles Herkenham, "Neuropeptides and their Receptors: A Psychosomatic Network," *The Journal of Immunology*, 1985, vol. 135, 820-826.
[94] The description recalls Gregory of Nyssa's attempt to describe the interaction of the mind with the body, as quoted in Section 1: "the mind approaching our nature in some inexplicable and incomprehensible way, and coming into contact with it, is to be regarded as both in it and around it, neither implanted in it nor enfolded with it, but in a way which we cannot speak or think."
[95] Michael Glasser et al. "A multi-modal parcellation of human cerebral cortex," Nature 536 (2016) 171-178.

A method called diffusion spectrum imaging invented only in the past few years produced the breath-taking scan shown in Figure 2 that reveals a grid-like order that astounded even most neuroscientists. Most expected a more tangled anatomy.

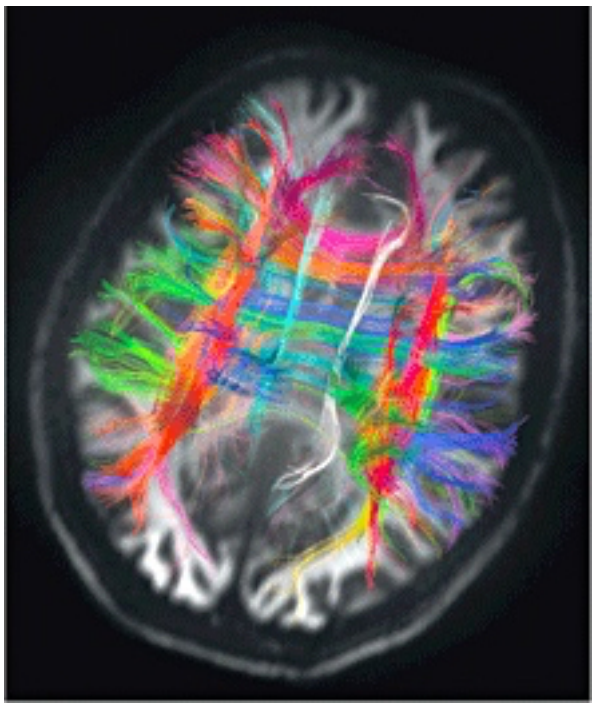

Figure 2: Fiber pathways of a female human brain mapped noninvasively with diffusion magnetic resonance imaging. The image shows an axial view from above (front of the brain is at top of the picture). Major pathways of the human frontal lobes, and their organization as orthogonal grids, are shown in color. The strings are the fibers of white matter: the long bodies of the brain cells called axons, white by virtue of a waxy coating called myelin. There are 100,000 miles of fibers in the human brain, enough to circle the Earth four times.[96]

Recent advances in the topic of neural plasticity indicate that the brain can be altered even into adulthood, including growth of new neurons,[97] new substructures

[96] From the cover of *Science*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Vol. 342, Issue 6158, 1 November 2013. Reprinted with permission from AAAS. Image by Van J. Wedeen, Aapo Nummenmaa, Ruopeng Wang, and Lawrence L. Wald/Athinoula A. Martinos Center for Biomedical Imaging, Massachusetts General Hospital, with support of NIH Human Connectome Project and NSF.

[97] K. Erickson, "Exercise training increases size of hippocampus and improves memory," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108 (2011) 3017-3022.

on the neurons (e.g. spines), new connections between neurons (synapses) and new receptors on neuron surfaces. For example, it is believed that the brain can remap and rewire in response to injury and training. Yet the assignment of brain regions to functions is thought to be fairly stable. In one study, Rodrigo Quian Quiroga found that one particular neuron fired when a patient was shown different photographs of television actress Jennifer Aniston (but not for photographs of others). The author suggests that it is the abstract identity that is stored and that there may be an "invariant, sparse and explicit code."[98] He suggests the situation is likely more complicated than a one-to-one correspondence between a face and a neuron, but the result indicates a certain stability between function and structure.

What does the MSIH say about the self, consciousness, qualia and spiritual experiences? Modern neuroscience has shown progress in understanding the anatomy and some of the function of the human brain that has allowed development of therapies for addiction, stroke, depression, trauma, seizures, tumors, dementia and other major brain diseases. Yet even the most recent map of the brain[99] shows no one part that is associated with "self." A journal editor writes

> Most of us share a strong intuition that our own self is an irreducible whole, that there must be some place in our brains where our perceptions and thoughts all come together and where our future actions are decided. Yet this view is now known to be incorrect—different mental processes are mediated by different brain regions, and there is nothing to suggest the existence of any central controller.[100]

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[98] R. Quian Quiroga, L. Reddy, G. Kreiman, C. Koch and I. Fried, "Invariant visual representation by single neurons in the human brain," *Nature*, 435 (2005) 1102-1107.
[99] Glasser, 173.
[100] Editorial "In search of self," *Nature Neuroscience* 5 (2002) 1099.

There are structures that are associated with parts of what we think of as "self."[101] Memories, stories and one's autobiography are thought to be coordinated by the hippocampus, a pair of midbrain structures. Those unconscious parts that act on one's behavior and indirectly shape one's self-concept in terms of demeanor, emotional temperature, tendency to worry, get angry, and how one finds pleasure are conjectured to reside in the amygdala and limbic system. How one thinks about oneself is thought to be handled by the cerebral cortex, the thinking brain. The cortex is subdivided. The prefrontal cortex is associated with thoughts, plans, imagination and ability to solve problems. The posterior parietal cortex is associated with distinguishing self from non-self; in other words, it is thought to establish the borders of the self. The orbitofrontal cortex is associated with goals, a sense of morality and ethics, and is possibly the seat of moral conscience. The temporal lobe of the associative cortex is associated with recognizing scenes, objects and faces, and processing sounds and language. There are particular structures for recognizing faces.[102] Talents such as music, art, and athletics lie in various parts of the brain, and also constitute part of one's self-concept.

Neuroscientists have identified some of the physical structures that correlate with consciousness. For example, by studying brain-damaged subjects who experienced unconsciousness or coma, it is ascertained that areas of the thalamus and cortex are associated with awareness, attention and self-reference.[103] A recent discovery in mouse brain of a "crown of thorns"-shaped cell that wraps continuously

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[101] Norden, 13.
[102] Jia Liu, Alison Harris, and Nancy Kanwisher, "Perception of Face Parts and Face Configurations: An fMRI Study," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 22(1) (2010) 203–211.
[103] Norden, 24.

around the brain is a tantalizing candidate for being linked to consciousness because of its shape and apparent connections to sensory inputs and outputs, but this is only a conjecture at this point.[104]

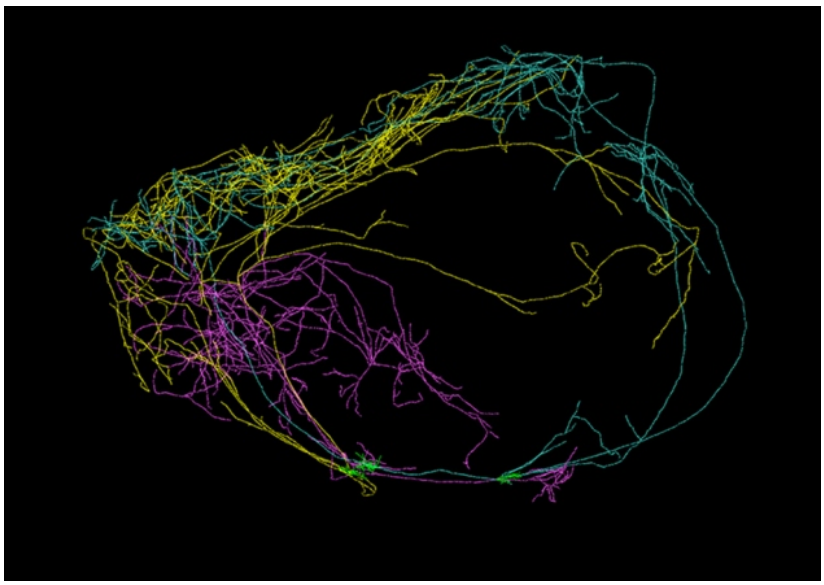

Figure 3: Giant neuron from mouse brain that is a continuous loop around the circumference of the brain.[105]

Understanding why humans have a subjective experience is more challenging. It is rather straightforward to understand how the wavelength of light associated with the color red can be absorbed by the eye resulting in a signal that travels to the brain. What is not understood is why the person *experiences* the color red. This is an example of "qualia," the person's subjective experience associated with stimulation to the brain. Further as Norden writes, "it is challenging to examine

[104] Christof Koch et al., reported in "Giant neuron encircles entire brain of a mouse," by Sara Reardon, *Nature* 543 (2017) 14-15.
[105] Reprinted by permission from Macmillan Publishers Ltd: NATURE 543 (2017) p. 14-15.

why consciousness appears to be 'something' that is happening to a 'me.'"[106] It is not known if other animals have self-awareness.

Wildman notes that science is also being used to study religion from various points of view. In the new field of neurotheology, scientists are attempting to understand spiritual experiences by searching for physical correlations in brain measurement data. The field is in its infancy and is controversial. Researchers claim that so far it does not appear that there is one part of the brain that is the center of spirituality. They have scanned the brains of monks in meditation and of nuns doing centering prayer.[107] There are multiple areas of the brain that "light up" during spiritual experiences, such as those associated with focus and emotion. An apparent decrease in activity in the posterior parietal cortex, which creates the boundary between self and others, could account for the feeling of unity with the world and/or God.[108] One of the challenges of the research, practitioners report, is that spiritual experiences are not uniform and each type may have its own brain signature.

The MSIH model has been used by atheists to argue against religion. It can be used to argue that religion is none other than mental states, having evolved for psychological need to orient oneself in the world and to manage group life.[109,110] Those following a religion would argue against both of these outcomes. They might

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[106] Norden, 25.
[107] Andrew Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology*, Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2010.
[108] Andrew Newberg et al., "The measurement of regional cerebral blood flow during the complex cognitive task of meditation: a preliminary SPECT study " *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 106, no. 2 (April 10, 2001) 113-122.
[109] Wildman, 581.
[110] Wildman himself concludes that the model is most consistent with a naturalistic humanism. He posits that the supernatural may not be necessary and might be an example of "over-belief." See Wesley Wildman, *Science and Theological Anthropology: A Spiritually Evocative Naturalist Interpretation of Human Life*, Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2009.

argue that MSIH is merely a limited vision of human beings. David Kelsey, who we turn to in the next chapter, points out that one cannot make a model where God has been systematically bracketed out, and then tack on God at the end.[111] On the other hand, using only the MSIH as the atheists do results in scientism: in Wildman's view "the bluntly ideological deployment of the sciences beyond their proper limitations that is rationally unjustifiable."[112] For example, there is little or no evidence to support the "no-gap" hypothesis of Figure 1.

Writing about the role of theology, David Kelsey states that what is desired are proposals that "comport with the person of Jesus" and "Holy Scripture's accounts of the ways in which God relates" and to explore what the beliefs imply.[113] David Kelsey writes that it is important to address the question: how do the claims relate to claims well warranted by, for example, the natural sciences?[114] He states the purpose of what he calls secondary theology is "to make proposals about how to best formulate the standards by which the adequacy of ecclesial communities' responses to God are to be assessed."[115] I will now turn to the work of David Kelsey to see how he responds to the challenge of an anthropological theology, while remaining hospitable to the sciences.

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[111] David Kelsey, "WJK Radio 10: David Kelsey on what it means to be a human being," WJK Radio, November 30, 2009.
[112] Wildman (2009), p. 6.
[113] David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 24. (hereafter called *EE*)
[114] *EE* 28.
[115] *EE* 153.

Section 3 begins our theological engagement with David Kelsey. Kelsey is a helpful theological dialogue partner because of the clarity of his thought and because Eccentric Existence integrates a great deal of knowledge from many disciplines – theology, anthropology, religion, psychology, ethics and science. The title Eccentric Existence comes from Kelsey's central tenet that human beings are what they are because of God relating to them. The result is that the basis for the value and relationship of the human being lies in God, that is, outside the human beings themselves. God is in the center, and human beings are eccentric. This section describes some of the basic tenets of Kelsey's theological anthropology, concentrating on God relating to humans as creator (Part I of Eccentric Existence). I first note Kelsey's use of Wisdom literature as source for his theological anthropology, and then discuss the contexts of the human: what Kelsey calls the proximate and the ultimate. Next I summarize the three ways that Kelsey says God relates to humans: by creating, by drawing to eschatological consummation and by reconciling. This is followed by how he answers the three questions of modern theological anthropology: What is human nature? How ought we to be? Who am I and who are we? I also summarize how he might answer: "Is personhood identical to being human?" and "Is personhood permanent"? The section concludes with a critique of Kelsey's work.

Section 3

1. Kelsey's focus on Wisdom literature rather than Genesis

As discussed in Section 1, the longest tradition in Christian theological anthropology is rooted in Genesis, which is the beginning of what Christians often view as the one long story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation – creation, humanity's fall from grace, deliverance by God and reunification at the eschaton. Using Claus Westermann's exegesis on Genesis, Kelsey makes the bold suggestion that Gen 1-3 is not an appropriate basis for theological anthropology. He agrees with Westermann that Gen 12-50 is an introduction to the story about God calling Abraham and the deliverance of God's people at the Reed Sea, and, further, that Gen 1-11 is like a "preface."[116] Chapters 1-3 as primeval history "make use of preexisting

[116] *EE*, 177.

traditions about how the world came to be,"[117] yet they are "bent" to fit the introduction to the redemption story.[118]

Kelsey disagrees with theological anthropologies derived from Gen 1:26-31 and 2.4b-25 that "warrant claims that human creatures are ensouled material bodies, created such that some particular human capacity or anthropological structure is the image of God, created in a state of original righteousness, and "fallen" from this prior state so that the image of God is damaged, obscured or destroyed."[119] Like Karl Barth, he explicitly rejects that a human capacity such as rationality is associated with the Imago Dei. Kelsey disagrees with the implications of these theologies that "focus on one's own existential relation to God, the unnaturalness of death, …work (as) a curse, … and individualistic existentialistic anthropocentrism."[120] The linear salvation "story" of humanity "characterizes humankind's context as marked by 'sin, guilt and punishment.'"[121] Thus Kelsey would disagree here with Augustine, for example, and at least in part with Descartes. Like Barth and Nancey Murphy, Kelsey does not believe there is an immaterial soul completely separate from the material body.

Kelsey prefers the Old Testament Wisdom literature - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Job - as the basis for his theological anthropology because he sees its narrative of creation as more pure, not as involved in eschatological or reconciling concerns. Kelsey writes that the literature is not "ordered to an account

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[117] *EE* 177.
[118] *EE* 188.
[119] *EE* 181.
[120] *EE* 182.
[121] *EE* 181.

of God's mighty acts of deliverance" the way that Genesis 1-11 is.[122] He prefers it for its focus on the every day world. Of Wisdom literature, he writes: "The relation between Creator and creature is best understood as God's being present to creation in hospitable generosity, free delight, and self-determining commitment."[123]

According to Kelsey, the Wisdom books have an identifiable creation theology. In the Genesis account of the creation of humans, Adam and Eve are created already developed. As perfect bodies, they cannot change, and thus they have no history, because history implies change.[124] They cannot "decline through disease or accident."[125] Kelsey cites this as an example of "a theologically problematic equation of human perfection with human actuality."[126] In Wisdom literature on the other hand, he "sees human beings as fragile, vulnerable and finite – and deemed good by God precisely in their fragility, vulnerability and finitude."[127]

In Job 10, Job was born as an infant, and his maturation will involve "mastering, and being formed by, myriad concepts, conceptually determinate beliefs, and conceptually formed emotions, passions, feelings, attitudes, and policies for action."[128] Job was born into a social situation that will form him: "complex networks of giving and receiving in relation to fellow creatures and in relation to God."[129] Further, Job's creation story emphasizes that his status is not dependent upon actualizing his capacities and powers, "nor can it be taken away by any failure

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[122] *EE* 188.
[123] *EE* 163.
[124] *EE* 300.
[125] *EE* 300.
[126] *EE* 300.
[127] Stephen Plant, "Christian Ethics as Eccentric Existence: On Relating Anthropology and Ethics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24 (3) 2011, 367-378, p. 371.
[128] *EE* 299.
[129] *EE* 300.

to actualize his capacities and exercise his powers appropriately."[130] Additionally, the "imperfections of … bodies in no way bring into question their actuality."[131] His status is permanent. Kelsey concludes from his reading of Job that "there is no absolute standard for human physical, mental or emotional perfection."[132] These conclusions are relevant to our discussion in Section 5 about dementia.

2. Proximate and Ultimate Contexts

Kelsey explains that by the mid-twentieth century, theological anthropology brought to bear three questions.[133] What is human nature? How ought we to be? (regarding human beings' freedom and responsibility.) Who am I and who are we? (regarding human identity).[134] Kelsey answers these questions in light of the fact that humans live in a *proximate* context, which he says consists of the finite physical and social worlds in which we live, the quotidian, that is, "the everyday finite realities of sorts – animal, vegetable and mineral."[135] Our finitude makes us inherently accident-prone, we inescapably damage each other, we decay, and we undergo hurt, loss and death.[136] Kelsey takes into account the evolutionary science view that the succession of generations enhances fitness by making room for progeny. He writes, "Creaturely change, including the destruction of creatures, is

[130] *EE* 300.
[131] *EE* 301.
[132] *EE* 303.
[133] David H. Kelsey, "The Human Creature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, John Webster and Kathryn Tanner, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 121-139, p. 122.
[134] *EE* 1-2.
[135] *EE* 190.
[136] *EE* 202.

precisely the mode God's ongoing creativity takes."[137] What might seem to be undesirable (e.g. death) comes with the nature of finite physical reality. Finitude is not an evil, and moral evil is not a consequence of finitude.[138]

Interestingly, Kelsey notes that our proximate context includes science. He wishes to remain "hospitable" to scientific views of what it is to be human, as partly reviewed in Section 2. Kelsey's view is that there is valuable information about human beings from science that can be put together with theological insights to gain higher truths. However, as mentioned in Section 2, he warns that a coherent model will not result from bracketing out God systematically, and then tacking on God at the end.[139] Harmony between the theological and scientific accounts is a worthy goal, but Kelsey's main quest is to formulate "the theological end of the bridge."[140]

On the other hand, there exists an *ultimate* context, which is the most fundamental and which for Jews, Christians and Muslims is "the reality of God and God actively relating."[141]

3. The Three Ways of God Relating to Humans

The center of Kelsey's anthropology is that human beings are what they are because of God relating to them. He conjectures there are three complexly interrelated but distinct and irreducible ways (or narratives) that God relates. These are three "kinds of inseparable narratives, each of which has a distinct plot or

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[137] *EE* 203.
[138] *EE* 212.
[139] *EE* 5.
[140] *EE* 7.
[141] *EE* 5.

narrative logic that cannot be conflated with the other two.[142] The first is creative blessing (in Latin, *salus*) both in the original creation and throughout history. "To say that the Father creates is to stress that the triune God's creating, grounded in the divine love in which God's reality is eternally given and received among the three hypostases (of the Trinity), is an inherently generative love."[143] Seen from this narrative, the ultimate context into which we are born is this: "God's hospitable generosity, creatively relating to us, free of creatures in creating and attentively delighting in them in their otherness to God, self-committed to that which is created." Kelsey writes, "we are radically dependent for our existence on God's ongoing creativity," producing a situation he calls "ontological finitude."[144]

The second narrative is the triune God drawing creation – and humankind as part of creation – "to the blessing of a final eschatological consummation."[145] In Scripture the final consummation is sometimes called the Kingdom of God. It refers to God's blessing of the new creation, as described in Revelation 21, for example. This is "God committing Godself…to draw all that is into God to eschatological consummation, and inaugurating fulfillment of that promise in the person of Jesus of Nazareth."[146] The ultimate context is: God's relating to humanity involves the promise of new life at the end of time. Note that the first two ways of God's relating have to do with human origins and ultimate fate.

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[142] *EE* 897.
[143] *EE* 123.
[144] *EE* 201.
[145] *EE* 442.
[146] *EE* 898.

Lastly, God relates to us when we are alienated from God (through sin), by reconciling us by "self-donation, God giving Godself, the Son, to human creatures."[147] The ultimate context here is "God's agape concretely enacted in Incarnation."[148] Note that in this construction of the human being, Kelsey "moves away from the modern emphasis on the human person as a center of consciousness,"[149] and the focus is on the person in relationship.

Eccentric Existence is structured around these three ways that God relates to us, three echoing the Trinity. Stephen Plant notes "the advantage to reconceiving the Bible in terms of three narratives rather than one is that it provides balance."[150] It provides a new kind of tool for theologians.

Kelsey proposes that the three narratives, being related to each other, can be pictured wound around each other (as in a triple helix) to constitute the Imago Dei, supporting humans and rendering their lives theocentric.[151] He notes that the three interwoven narrative strands are inseparable with a fixed internal structure because they are related through Jesus Christ. Recalling Section 1, we saw as early as St. Basil that the formal title "Image of God" was reserved only for Jesus Christ, and this is repeated by many including Karl Barth. Alistair McFadyen articulates this relation: Jesus is "the place where divine address and undistorted human response

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[147] *EE* 129.
[148] *EE* 605.
[149] Han-luen Kantzer Komline, "Tracing the Triple Helix: the Reformed and Ecumenical Shape of David Kelsey's Theological Anthropology," *Journal of Reformed Theology*, vol. 6 no. 1 (2012) p. 58.
[150] Plant, 370.
[151] *EE* 897

coincide…and is therefore the enacting of the image in its fullness."[152] Tanner elaborates further:

> Christ is the paradigm for this strong sort of imaging through participation. The human being, Jesus, is the image of God in a much stronger sense than any creature, human or otherwise, could ever be on its own, because Christ's humanity has the divine image for its own through the Word's assuming or uniting that humanity to itself in becoming incarnate in him. As a result of this hypostatic union of incarnation, perfect human imaging of God is achieved by way of perfect unity with what is perfectly and properly the image of God, the second person of the trinity…Despite the difference in nature that remains between humanity and the second person, the perfect hypostatic unity of the two of them in Christ makes him the perfect human image of the second person of the trinity…[153]

4. What We Are As Human Creatures

It should be noted that for the purposes of his account, Kelsey is uncomfortable with the word "person."[154] He notes the complexity associated with the word because it can be used descriptively or normatively. It is used descriptively to classify, for example, "this entity is a human person; that one is a very smart chimpanzee; that is a highly complex robot; and that is an angel."[155] In this sense, a being is either a person or not. The word person can also be used normatively, which can be by degree. "One may be either more or less 'really' a human person; or, as it is sometimes put, one may have either more or less fully 'actualized' one's 'real personhood.'[156] Kelsey rejects this concept, because taken to its limit, this means there would be the possibility of being a "perfect person" with 100% score on all

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[152] quoted in Kelsey, 2007, p. 131
[153] Tanner, 13.
[154] With regard to use of the term person when it comes to the three persons of the Trinity, Kelsey is clear that this meaning is about "relations in being" or perichoresis, not related to the common meaning associated with human beings. *EE 70*.
[155] *EE* 204.
[156] *EE* 204.

"possible degrees of completeness."[157] However it is not possible to describe all those degrees making up personhood, nor to establish criteria for the 100% score (and the criteria might vary by individual). Since one must be classified as a person in the descriptive sense to even start being considered as a person in the normative sense, the two meanings are conflated. Because of the complexity of these common usages, Kelsey prefers to avoid the term "person" altogether.

Next consider the word human. The modern secular interpretation of humanity as discussed in Section 2 would use the criterion of having DNA of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Kelsey basically agrees with this but points out that this has the problem of applying also to say, a human bone, or human tissue in a Petrie dish (we would not say this is a person) and to the more complicated situation of a fetus.[158] In order to be clear, he uses the phrase "actual human living bodies" instead of "person." Alternatively he sometimes uses the adjective "personal," as in "personal living bodies." This definition includes any living human regardless of their age, physical or cognitive abilities, what sexual organs one has, or which constructed racial types. Artificial intelligence would not qualify, as it is not a "body." Aliens on another planet would not qualify, as there is no human DNA. Having an "actual human living body" is identical to being a human.

Our "creaturely ontological integrity" is a function of God relating to us.[159] It is not physical in nature (we do not lose it with physical injury for example), nor mental, nor emotional, and a creature retains that integrity even "when it has deeply

[157] *EE* 205.
[158] *EE* 257.
[159] *EE* 282.

compromised itself morally."[160] This is reminiscent of Barth's discussion of the human constitution quoted in Section 1.[161] In all of these circumstances, even in the case of severe dementia, for example, God remains in relationship permanently. Kelsey writes:

> By God's gracious creative hospitality, she or he is still, in company with other creatures, God's genuinely 'other' partner in a community of discourse, called by God to be wise, and capable of responding in some manner to God, even if only, like many living creatures, by its sheer mute presence before God.[162]

In considering what we are as human creatures, Kelsey exegetes Job 10. He believes that relying on a theological definition of human beings such as "bearer of the image of God" can lead to a vicious circle.[163] But referring to "actual human living bodies" he offers his opinion that they are related to by God through creating, drawing to eschatological consummation and reconciling, and they have "unqualified dignity and value and deserv(e) unqualified respect solely because they are God's creatures."[164] Kelsey writes, "Personal bodies are the glory (in Greek *doxa*) of God."[165]

Kelsey invokes neither a rational soul nor the theological concept of the image of God.[166] He says that a soul is not needed for God to relate to human beings.

> Nonetheless, ascription of a nonmaterial soul or spirit to human living bodies is not required by the claim that God's continual relation to us as our creator is as immediate as it is universal.[167]

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[160] *EE* 282.
[161] Karl Barth, Vol. III., part 2, 347.
[162] *EE* 282.
[163] *EE* 258.
[164] *EE* 254.
[165] *EE* 311.
[166] *EE* 264.
[167] *EE* 257.

He believes that theology must respond to the modern secular interpretation of humanity, which attributes higher human capacities to brain physiology, not to a soul.[168] The Old Testament, he notes, lacks the body-soul distinction. God made promises without relating through a human soul. Rather, Kelsey writes, "God as Creator is no closer to spirit than God is to physical matter."[169] Significantly, Kelsey believes that the "concept of 'living human body' suggests that it is so complex that an exhaustive reduction of it to a set of natural processes is implausible."[170] Being nonreductionist (or nonphysicalist), Kelsey would disagree with the validity of assumptions in Figure 1 (Section 2), and Wildman's conclusion about natural humanism. In fact, he says "we are created by being given a living human body by God, to whom we are then accountable for at least some of that body's behavior in response to God and to fellow creatures."[171]

Kelsey does away with the grounds that humanity differs from animals by virtue of being self-determining or having language or rationality. These he feels are too narrow a basis, possibly excluding infants and the rationally impaired.[172] Rather, what demands dignity is "God's relating to human beings creatively" expanding "to cover all actual living human personal bodies."[173] This implies permanence. The goodness of creatures including actual human living bodies is "grounded in God's self-commitment to valuing creatures in delight with them for what they are, valuing

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[168] Kelsey, 2009.
[169] *EE* 256.
[170] *EE* 284.
[171] *EE* 284.
[172] *EE* 276.
[173] *EE* 277.

them in the free and delighted intimacy and the intimate and attentive freedom of God's creative ongoing active relating to them."[174]

Relationships with other creatures - other humans as well as other living beings - are critical, "so interior to me as to be essential to making me the concretely particular human living body that I am."[175] As actual living human personal bodies, we help construct others' identities as well. Societal and cultural contexts can sometimes fail to adequately form and nurture some of us. Neediness and desire, however, are constitutive of creatureliness and not a failure.[176] We are accountable to show respect for others, which means, "taking actions to nurture the well-being of such capacities and powers as they may have for their own accountable response, with their neighbors, to God who gives them living bodies and to the neighbors with whom they share proximate contexts."[177]

Kelsey echoes Barth's idea that recognition of us by God depends less upon our own particular state, since God is doing most of the work. Kelsey uses personhood language briefly when he writes,

> Personhood is not even a function of how we relate to God…our personhood is entirely a function of how God relates to us in creating us…The possibility in us of our being addressed by God, our addressability – and hence, our status as persons – follows excellently from the actuality of God speaking to us, and hardly at all from anything else.[178]

Susannah Cornwall explains, "Kelsey's eccentric locus for human personhood starts from God's relationship to human beings, and is firstly about divine characteristics,

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[174] *EE* 270.
[175] *EE* 283.
[176] *EE* 267.
[177] *EE* 279.
[178] *EE* 296.

not human ones."[179] Kelsey qualifies, however, that "human persons may not act out of that status,"[180] that is, their choices may be disappointing in light of their status.

5. Who We Are As God's Creatures

Insofar as the question "who?" refers to personal identity, Kelsey believes that personal identities are described by stories, especially those that tell of "intentional actions the person has done in certain circumstances" such that they capture "who she most basically was."[181] They also capture "who…persists through change across time."[182] That our biography helps to define who we are makes sense to us. Further, the manner a person is loved by others makes them unsubstitutable.[183]

One answer that Kelsey gives to the question "who am I?" is: "I am 'one radically given to by God.'"[184] A second answer is that I am not isolated, rather, "I have my personal identity only in giving to others, so that they are to a certain degree inherently dependent on me, and in being given to by others, so that I am inherently dependent on them."[185] Kelsey makes clear that one's personal identity does not depend on others' judgments – rather it is grounded in God.[186]

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[179] Susannah Cornwall, "Intersex and the Rhetorics of Disability and Disorder: Multiple and Provisional Significance in Sexed, Gender and Disabled Bodies," *Journal of Disability and Religion*, vol. 19 (2015) 106-118, p. 110.
[180] *EE* 297.
[181] *EE* 334.
[182] *EE* 335.
[183] *EE* 391.
[184] *EE* 338.
[185] *EE* 338.
[186] *EE* 340.

6. How We Are to Be as Faithful Creatures

Wisdom literature calls us to be wise and faithful and to lead healthy, joyful and prosperous lives. Stephen Plant summarizes Kelsey's response to "how we are to be": "The three appropriate patterns of response required of creatures are response to the creator in faith, response to eschatological consummation in hope, and response to the one who reconciles in love."[187] In terms of how we are to be, Kelsey emphasizes gratitude: "Reverent and awed doxological gratitude to God for our proximate contexts is appropriate both to the hospitable generosity of God's free creating and to God's own self-committed loyalty to the society of creatures constituted by God's creative address."[188] Secondly, we are to be aware of our vocation to care for creation. Kelsey writes, "we are born into a vocation from God, mediated through the quotidian, to be wise in our practices for the well-being of the quotidian."[189] Thirdly, as human living bodies, we are to have faith: "trust in God as ground of their being and value and as loyalty to God's own creative project."[190] Fourth, we are to love. Tom Greggs summarizes Kelsey: "Love is considered the appropriate response of human creatures…Kelsey stresses here the two distinct enactments of 'love to God'… and 'love as neighbour', which is understood as a participation in the triune God's love for us."[191]

Kelsey notes that God made human beings sufficiently free that we can fail to live in communion with God. We are capable of separating ourselves from God,

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[187] Plant, 370.
[188] *EE* 340.
[189] *EE* 213.
[190] *EE* 310.
[191] Tom Greggs, "Article Review: David Kelsey, Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 65 (4) (2012) 449-463, p. 455.

living as if we are in charge. Recognizing the limited time we have, we live on "borrowed breath."[192] In order to flourish, Kelsey believes that human beings are to live for the well-being of their everyday context:

> Human persons' flourishing in their kind is inseparable from the flourishing of all creatures in their kinds. Hence human creatures' glory, whatever it is, lies neither historically behind the quotidian (Eden) nor ahead of it (in the "kingdom of God"). Nor does it lie above the quotidian in transcendence of the everyday. It lies rather in human creatures being dedicatedly active for the well-being of their everyday proximate contexts as citizens of the society of creatures that comprise the quotidian.[193]

We adapt the orientation that "God is glorious," which "involves the speaker in commitments to a range of attitudes, passions, and dispositions that are coherent with the doxological feelings."[194] This lifestyle should also "envision its proximate contexts within the ultimate context of the triune God's actively relating to them."[195]

7. Summary

Part of what makes Kelsey's methodology so compelling is the simplicity. In the heart of Kelsey's doctrine, a human being is made a "personal living human body" by virtue of God relating to her or him.[196] Kelsey then continues by arguing that God relates in three ways: by creating, by drawing us to a redeemed life in an eschatological realm and by reconciling us to God through Jesus Christ. Yet Kelsey agrees with the secular model that to be human is to have human DNA and to be a

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[192] *EE* 309.
[193] *EE* 315.
[194] *EE* 311.
[195] *EE* 321.
[196] Kelsey tries to avoid the term "person" because he believes it has too many complex meanings in our culture.

living body, meaning, the umbilical cord is cut. In his view, a human creature has "integral ontological unity." Kelsey claims that the creaturely integrity is not our physical biological integrity, which can be violated by physical assault, loss of limbs or mobility, nor our psychological integrity, which can be disrupted for physical, psychodynamic or chemical reasons, nor our moral integrity.[197] Dignity and respect follow the integral ontological unity. Even in the case of severe loss such as coma or severe dementia, the human is capable of responding to God, if only by "sheer mute living presence before God." Their integrity lies in their ex-centeredness, with God in the center, rooted in the ways that God relates to them. This is the vertical dimension.

Human creatures are profoundly dependent on other creatures to be who and how they are. They actively relate and are actively related to by other creatures in a way that help construct their identities. This is the horizontal dimension. Others' judgments do not define those identities; God's relating defines a human creature's identity.

Kelsey's position is different from the Cartesian and pre-Cartesian thinkers, who often focused on the individual as an ensouled rational animal. Kelsey finds several implications of this view profoundly problematic: "human self interested exploitation and devastation of fellow creatures,"[198] the tendency to undervalue the body resulting in "suspicion, fear and disparagement"[199]of it, and the historicity of

[197] *EE* 282.
[198] *EE* 30.
[199] *EE* 31.

Adam and Eve and the fall.[200] Kelsey wants to place human flourishing and developing in community. How would this horizontal dimension work if there were only one person left on Earth? This person is still defined by the rest of creation and by God. As personal living human bodies, we exist in the "proximate context" of creation, along with all the social and everyday components that have co-evolved with us. Our vocation is to work for its good.

Can the status associated with the personal living human body be lost? We know that such a body can lose awareness/consciousness, a body can change personality (for example through a brain injury), and a body can lose cognition (through dementia, for example.) We saw in Section 1 that Augustine and some of the early Church Fathers wrote that some or all of the Imago Dei can be lost and powers weakened through sin. Kelsey notes that God made us free to decide to separate from God. He thinks of sin as separation or alienation from God and others, which hurts the relationship but does not break it. In sin, our history with God and others becomes eroded, which lessens our own constitution and position in creation. We lose the richness and depth of the encounter. Kelsey objects that a human's status is lost, even when they commit a moral evil, because relationship with God and with humans still exists.

If I am my brain/mind, or if I am my body, as the physicalists would say, and I lose part of my brain or body, am I less of a person? What is the relation of the "I" and extended matter? What if I change my body significantly, say, with a sex change? Kelsey seems likely to respond, no, God relates to human living bodies with personal

[200] *EE* 35.

identities, not just to brains or minds or the physical body. He relates to the being having the identity associated with his or her story. Even a sex change is part of the narrative, which links one's identity across history. For Kelsey, being a personal living human body is permanent.

8. Critique

Eccentric Existence has been called "one of the most important contributions to Christian theology of any kind and by any theologian in our generation."[201] At the beginning, Kelsey lists desiderata for a contemporary anthropological theology, and it appears that he has been successful in meeting these criteria. He says it should be theocentric. Human beings' privilege should come from being bodily public agents in community. The theology should derive from more basic Christian claims about ways God relates to all that is not God (here, the three ways). Human beings in no way earn or exact that relationship with God. The proposals should "avoid reliance on invidious comparison and contrast either with other creatures or between various aspects of human beings themselves, and…(be) logically independent of the historicity of Adam and Eve and the fall."[202] He continues, human beings should be recognizably personal, and the model should "comport conceptually with scriptural and modern scientific discourses about human being."[203]

[201] Plant, 368.
[202] *EE* 41.
[203] *EE* 41.

Several authors have criticized Kelsey's proposal that God relates to humans in three ways – creation, consummation and reconciliation.[204,205,206,207] Are the three narrative strands truly "irreducible"? Does the combination exhaustively cover the Biblical space? Han-luen Kantzer Komline asks, "On what basis does Kelsey determine that the multiplicity of scriptural stories about how God relates to us is adequately conveyed in a clique of three?"[208] Catherine Pickstock believes that his commitment to finding these three ways in the Bible is "extreme."[209] Her view is that "the framework which permits there to be just one story seems more fitting to the simplicity of the God of monotheism."[210] She does not see why "three distinct decisions in God to order the world in terms of three distinct plots requires the corresponding idea of three distinct divine hypostases."[211] In a reply, Kelsey answers "the ways in which the three narratives are related to one another in theology need to respect the distinctive plotline or 'narrative logic' of each, or else one or two of them will be misrepresented. The emphasis on their distinctness is in service of clarity about their inter-relations."[212] I think that the three strands motif is useful and that Kelsey approaches it as a thought experiment for the purpose of

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[204] Greggs
[205] David Ford, "Humanity Before God; Thinking Through Scripture: Theological Anthropology and the Bible," in Gene Outka (ed.), *The Theological Anthropology of David Kelsey*, Grand Rapids MI: William Eerdmans Publ., 2016, 31-52.
[206] Komline
[207] Catherine Pickstock, "The One Story: a Critique of David Kelsey's Theological Robotics," *Modern Theology*, vol. 27 (1 Jan 2011) 26-40.
[208] Komline, 64
[209] Pickstock, 27.
[210] Pickstock, 29.
[211] Pickstock, 30.
[212] David Kelsey, "Response to the Symposium on Eccentric Existence," *Modern Theology*, 27 (1 January 2011) 72-86, p. 82.

seeing what new theological anthropology can result. I agree with David Ford that despite the controversy this approach is reasonable and "remarkably fruitful."[213]

As for scriptural discourses, Kelsey favors the Wisdom literature over Genesis. This is a bold move and one that has drawn some fire from critics. Pickstock objects to his disfavor of Genesis. Kelsey's thinks that instead of human beings as the Imago Dei, they are the image once removed through Christ. Pickstock says that this produces a problem in the logic of the Christian story because it was "*conveniens* for God to become incarnate in man because human beings are in the image of God."[214] However, this idea is not new with Kelsey; we saw it in Basil, Barth and McFadyen, and the same criticism could be made of Origen.[215] Pickstock's major complaint is that under Kelsey, human beings seem soulless, "reduced to objects," and in a "de-spiritualized sphere of one-sided relational dependency on God."[216] Kelsey responds, that *Eccentric Existence* "repeatedly stresses that (human beings) are inherently centers of finite powers not only in relation to one another but also in their response to God."[217] I find Kelsey's exegesis of Job 10 to reveal human persons as highly complex.

Kelsey's anthropology has elements that are coherent with understandings of the human body by the sciences and the secular view of humanity, but there are also some differences. (1) Kelsey agrees with the secular model that higher human capacities are associated with human physiology. He writes, "It is increasingly clear

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[213] Ford, 35.
[214] Pickstock, 34.
[215] Origen, quoted in Komline, p. 67.
[216] Pickstock, 36.
[217] Kelsey, 2011, 79.

from research in neurology, evolutionary neurology, and neuropsychology that human powers of sensation, feeling, emotion, awareness, self-awareness, cognition, memory, reasoning, language and consciousness…presuppose an organic basis in the human physical brain and nervous system."[218] He says there is no immaterial "soul." Like current science, his view of the human is unitive, rather than Descartes' dualistic one. Kelsey's view is not reductionist, however. He writes of a "complexity in unity"[219] and of God relating to us "creatively to constitute each of us as a unity in complexity."[220] (2) Kelsey sees death as a natural means for God's working in the world through evolution, a mechanism elucidated by scientific discovery. He would say humans are not in the center; science would say that humans are currently dominant (some want to call this the anthropocene age), but not central in a fundamental way. The secular picture conjectures that barring extinction, humans will be superseded by better-adapted species. Kelsey does not confirm or deny this point. He seems likely to confirm that God is in the center (whereas science does not speak about a center.) (3) Kelsey stresses that the everyday world including society and culture is important, and humans share the stage with other creatures, all of which is consistent with the scientific view. (4) He says that humans are fallible and fragile not because of original sin but as a function of their finitude, which echoes biological and ecological principles. (5) As for the question, what is a human?, Kelsey agrees with science that a human is a living personal body with human DNA. By living, he means that it has been born, uses energy systems, is growing and is dying

[218] *EE* 540.
[219] *EE* 285.
[220] *EE* 286.

(like Job), and this is totally consistent with science. (6) Like the scientific picture, Kelsey thinks that humans are set apart neither by the Imago Dei nor a soul but by their "distinctive array of capacities"[221] including the mental and the emotional, which in the secular model result from the very large and hugely connected human brain. Kelsey also thinks that humans are set apart by virtue of God relating, which is not in the secular account.

There is a possible contradiction in Kelsey's account of the relation of humans to each other (the horizontal). He writes about the importance of other creatures in constructing one's concrete identity.

> The consequences of other creatures' active relating to me are so interior to me as to be *essential to making me the concretely particular human living body that I am, with the quotidian personal identity I actually have ("who" I am)* and the concrete way in which I am in fact set into my proximate contexts ("how" I am). This in no way counts as a violation of my creaturely integrity. To the contrary, this type of dependence on other creatures is an essential condition of my creaturely integrity having the concretely actual personal identity it does have.[222]

Later, he writes that other creatures do not construct our identity:

> The first answer to the question, 'Who are we as creatures?' makes it clear that while I have my personal identity only in and through relations with other creatures of giving and receiving, *my personal identity is not given to me by them in their assessment of me and it does not depend on their judgments of me. My personal identity is free of them,* grounded elsewhere. I am radically given to directly only by the triune God…Faith is the attitude of trust in God's radical giving of reality as alone definitive of my personal identity…Your personal identity is defined by God alone and not by any creature.[223]

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[221] *EE* 265.
[222] *EE* 282-283, italics mine.
[223] *EE* 339-340, italics mine.

The question of how other creatures affect our personal identities could be clearer in Kelsey's account. I believe that McFayden says it more clearly when he writes:

> Through others' address, intentions, and expectations I receive understandings of what it is to be 'self', and who I in particular am perceived to be as a self, understandings I accept or resist idiosyncratically. Personal identity is 'sedimented' through this public dialogical history. I acquire a 'sense of self', a 'theory' about myself, and with it the 'capacity to organize oneself in a centred way and act autonomously' and to resist some of others' addresses, intentions and expectations.[224]

The next section focuses on the application of Kelsey's theology of personhood to a limit case at the edges of life: severe dementia.

[224] Alistair McFayden, quoted in Kelsey, 2007, p. 131.

Section 4: Günter Thomas wrote that "a theological and phenomenologically realistic discussion of the person and of human dignity must touch upon the… 'edges of life.'"[225] This includes cases of high dependence that can mark the beginning and end of life, including dementia as well as disability (physical and mental). It can also include examples of "otherness" such as transgender identity, sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, etc., as well as trans-humanism, that is, the technological enhancing of the human. A brief excursion into the examples of disability and transgender identity provide the opportunity to learn from existing theological literature in these areas, some of which also applies to dementia. Whereas David Kelsey does not engage in depth with these questions, his approach that human identity is grounded eccentrically can provide some insight. Here, we have a better chance to understand the problems of relying on the historically predominant model of personhood, and to see how we might overcome them with a broader (Kelsey's) model. I include Kelsey's arguments about the quality of life and flourishing as a moral category.

Section 4

1. The historically predominant model of personhood using rationality as a criterion

One definition of personhood from medical ethics goes beyond what Kelsey called categorical, i.e. having human DNA and being a living human body, and has instead a normative aspect: a person is "a rational, conscious, autonomous, and self-determining being who has certain rights and deserves legal recognition."[226] Ethicists engage in heated debates when they try to apply this concept. Günter Thomas poses the question: "Are all human beings persons, with a justified claim for the recognition of one's dignity and elementary rights, or only those human beings who can show and practice certain properties, specific capabilities, and dispositions?"[227]

Peter Singer is an atheist and prominent secular philosopher who embraces utilitarianism – the rational maximization of utility. He feels that we have a moral

[225] Thomas, 370.
[226] Thomas, 376.
[227] Thomas, 376.

duty to decrease the level of suffering. He separates "human being" and "person," and this leads to degrees of moral value of a person. Singer writes, "I propose to use 'person' in the sense of *a rational and self-aware being*."[228] His analysis concludes that taking a life is wrong if the being is cognizant of their future and is anticipating a future. This argument may imply that some humans, including infants and those with severe dementia, are "non-persons." Singer is known for advocating voluntary or non-voluntary[229] (but not involuntary) euthanasia for those deemed "non-persons."[230] While Singer is an extreme example and a minority position, especially when it comes to the non-voluntary, this helps to portray the range of thoughts that occupy the contemporary ethical landscape.

This thesis argues that the granting of personhood by virtue of rationality is the outcome of two millennia of privileging rationality over human qualities such as emotion, sensation, feeling, awareness, self-awareness, cognition, memory, language and consciousness. This is not to say that rationality is not important, for it certainly is, but it fails as a single determinant of the status of personhood.

2. Considering the edges of life – examples of disability and transgender

Aside from extreme examples such as Singer, in Western society there are hints that aspects of "reduced" personhood affect our attitudes and actions concerning the edges of life, as demonstrated by the two stories at the beginning of

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[228] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 74-75. (italics mine)
[229] Nonvoluntary euthanasia is when the patient is unable to express a desire for or against euthanasia, such as an infant or someone who is not conscious or severely cognitively impaired.
[230] Interestingly, when Singer's mother developed Alzheimer's Disease, he did not put into action his own recommendations, saying, "it is different when it's your mother." ("The Dangerous Philosopher," *The New Yorker*, Sept. 6, 1999)

the Preface. Problematic are exclusionary and prejudiced behavior toward persons on the margin including those with disabilities (physical and mental), transgender people and those with illnesses causing mental decline. This would also apply to the sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism and so on. Seeing a person as "less than" promotes an attitude of stigma that raises the general populace's fear of these labels and categories.

There is already a theological literature about the disabled that has done the work of revealing our society's generic distrust of otherness. Robert Song notes, "disabled people still feel tolerated rather than actively welcomed and affirmed."[231] He continues, "An individual's attitudes towards disability are forged at a much deeper level of buried anxieties about his or her own vulnerability and encroaching mortality, and while these fears remain, disabled people will continue to be the objects of other people's projected lack of acceptance."[232] This negative effect of projection functions in many cases, for example, the case of dementia may subconsciously spark in others fears of aging, dependence and mortality.

Nancy Eiesland notes that God chose the most unexpected body for his appearance.[233] Jesus is in the "social–symbolic order at the margins with people with disabilities and instigates transformation from this de-centered position."[234] Jesus in his physicality teaches us to be human. She writes about Jesus Christ

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[231] Robert Song, "Conclusion: Fragility and Grace; Theology and Disability," in *Theology, Disability and the New Genetics: Why Science Needs the Church*, ed. by John Swinton and Brian Brock, T&T Clark, 2007, 234-244, p. 239.
[232] Song, 240.
[233] Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
[234] Eiesland, 100.

becoming disabled on Good Friday and his appearance to his disciples after the crucifixion:

> In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God. Jesus, the resurrected Savior, calls for his frightened companions to recognize in the marks of impairment their own connection with God, their own salvation. In so doing, this disabled God is also *the revealer of a new humanity*. The disabled God is not only the One from heaven but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.[235]

Eiesland reminds us that Jesus had the disciples touch his wounds. She writes, "to be touched by frightened friends alters the taboo of physical avoidance of disability and calls for followers to recognize their connection and equality at the point of Christ's physical impairment."[236] For those with disabilities, whether apparent or hidden, "accepting the disabled God may enable reconciliation with their own bodies and Christ's body the church."[237] In Christ's suffering we see the "mixed blessing of life and bodies,"[238] and "an acceptance of limits as the truth of being human."[239]

Bernd Wannenwetsch takes this further, pointing out that "the act of definition in the case of personhood is not a merely cognitive and distanced process of categorization, but is an intrinsically self-engaging phenomenon in which *one discovers oneself as a person* at the moment of recognizing the other as a person."[240] He continues:

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[235] Eiesland, 100 (italics mine).
[236] Eiesland, 101.
[237] Eiesland, 101.
[238] Eiesland, 102.
[239] Eiesland, 103.
[240] Bernd Wannenwetsch, quoted in Song, 241 (italics mine).

> The issue is not one of ascribing rights, as if we were in the quasi-divine position of deciding whether or not to attribute value to someone, but of acknowledging inherent claims on us, taking cognizance of a new fixed point of reference around which we are to organize ourselves. For this reason, people with severe disabilities, rather than being at the margins of the language-game of personhood, are at its centre, for they clarify that human dignity is fundamentally a matter of the humanity that is summoned forth in us as we recognize that we belong together and are called to be with each other.[241]

This argument recalls Kelsey's emphasis that our identities are formed by each other, and that "dependence on other creatures is an essential condition of my creaturely integrity."[242] This dependence is mutual for the person with the disability as well as the family member and caregiver. Song writes of the "foundational solidity and non-negotiable presence of disabled people's lives, and therefore *of all human lives*,"[243] and finally, that "the common calling in Christ which disabled and non-disabled share with each other categorically transcends whatever differences they may have from each other."[244] This calls to mind an observation in Section 1 concerning Augustine who said that as images of God, all humans are blurred images. On the very large scale of the differences between God and humans, people with dementia are only a small bit more blurred than the rest of us. We are all blurred and not that different from each other.

In writing about the disabled and variantly sexed and gendered bodies, Cornwall finds Kelsey's theological anthropology useful, particularly his assertion

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[241] Wannenwetcsh, quoted in Song, 241.
[242] *EE* 283.
[243] Song, 242 (italics mine).
[244] Song, 243.

that human identity is grounded eccentrically.[245] The problem, she writes, is that accounts of human sex, gender and embodiment have in the past been under the single lens of heteronormativity. She suggests, "a more appropriate means of figuring 'marginal' bodies theologically is as multiply and provisionally significant."[246] Her read of Kelsey and others is that personhood-in-God is primary and that "the bodily forms in which humans live are secondary to primary identity in God."[247] She restates Kelsey's (and Barth's similar) position that God's relationship to human beings is more about "divine characteristics, not human ones."[248] She emphasizes Kelsey's instruction that we live in our proximate context in our quotidian lives that includes our sex, ability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, economic status and status of our health, with the intention of benefitting the quotidian. Cornwall also states that our quotidian identities "are not the truest or most fundamental things about us; the truest and most fundamental thing about us is our basic personal identity as grounded in the God who is beyond us."[249]

I think that the disability and transgender literature discussed above works also for people with dementia, who are scrutinized under the western lens of hyper-rationality.[250] Kelsey's explanation is effective here because, as Cornwall points out, since he did not use the Imago Dei doctrine, "it is harder to simply say that some body-stories have deviated away from imaging God and are therefore

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[245] Cornwall, 106.
[246] Cornwall, 106.
[247] Cornwall, 106.
[248] Cornwall, 110.
[249] Cornwall, 111-112.
[250] Post, 3.

pathological."[251] Further, because the relationship depends primarily on divine and not on human activity, it is not only a matter of human consensus. Citing Hans Reinders, Cornwall adds that since "the human being exists only as a continued gift of God…there is a profound equality of abled and disabled persons in the eyes of God via divine acceptance of their being and a universal drawing-into-communion, so that *acceptance of the other is the only necessary response* when personhood is in question.[252]

3. David Kelsey

In terms of the "what" question (what are we as human creatures?), David Kelsey has given a very broad definition of "living human bodies." He speaks of them as granted by God through a relationship with God, and God calls human creatures good. The term seems to be granted liberally no matter the circumstance, as long as the body is alive, has human DNA and the umbilical cord is cut. The answer "does not admit of degrees."[253]

Kelsey does not engage in depth with questions of gender, race, sex and class, other-ableness, etc. These appear in his answer to the "who" question (who are we as human creatures?) Whereas his answer to the "what" question does not admit of degree, his answer to the "who" question does. The descriptors of gender, etc., are part of "quotidian personal identities," which are "constructed through time by the interplay among its human body's biological and somewhat malleable givens, the

[251] Cornwall, 115.
[252] Cornwall, 116 (italics mine).
[253] David Kelsey, "Response to Tom Greggs," Scottish Journal of Theology 65 (4) (2012) 464-470, p. 468.

system of roles and status which structure its particular proximate contexts and are projected on it, its history of interactions with others, and how it interprets this interplay."[254] These are partly ascribed to people by their cultures and partly self-ascribed.[255] He writes that these are important topics for another book. His focus is on "basic personal identities," which are constituted by their being drawn into eschatological consummation and their being reconciled through Christ, which "do admit of degree."[256] He writes:

> It is not the particulars of the construction of any one quotidian personal identity (body type – including biological sex; range of abilities or absence of any; gender roles; sexual orientation; race; class; etc.) which are assessed by these norms, but whether a given quotidian personal identity is lived in its proximate context in ways which are appropriate responses to the way God relates to us. That is a sense of the "good" that admits of degrees.[257]

Eccentric Existence does not engage in depth with ethics or practical aspects of theological anthropology such as pastoral care. Kelsey distinguishes what he calls primary and secondary theology. Primary theology is associated with the practices of the church, whereby "every member of an ecclesial community considers whether what she or her community says and does is appropriate."[258] Members practice primary theology,

> when they critically reflect together, perhaps disagree, in any case puzzle in ad hoc ways about the adequacy or appropriateness, that is, the "faithfulness," of certain received ways in which they have been expressing themselves in some other communal practice – whether in ethical analysis, moral judgment-making, prayer, education,

[254] Kelsey, 2012, 470.
[255] Kelsey, 2011, 80.
[256] Kelsey, 2012, 469.
[257] Kelsey, 2012, 470.
[258] Plant, 373.

> communal decision-making, liturgies for any of many different kinds of practices…pastoral caring in relation to a huge array of types of human problems, spiritual direction, etc.[259]

Rather, *EE*'s focus is secondary theology, which is critical reflection whose goal is to produce "new formulations in the light of cultural changes and new knowledge."[260] These formulations, then, affect the practice of the faith as they become incorporated (or not) in primary theology.

If we were to seek a (primary) theology of pastoral care for the example of severe dementia, we could use at least six of Kelsey's general principles. First, Kelsey emphasizes God's relating to us, focusing on the person in relationship, not on the person as an individual. Our status as persons "follows from the actuality of God speaking to us, and hardly at all from anything else,"[261] even if we are impaired. It is a theocentric picture. This recalls Barth's idea that recognition of us by God depends less on our own particular state, since God is doing most of the work. God seeks us more than we seek God. Faith in this idea has the potential to be pastorally significant to the person with dementia and the family.

Secondly, our "creaturely ontological integrity" is preserved even if our cognitive abilities fail, because God remains in relationship permanently. Our ability to give glory to God may be reduced to "sheer mute presence,"[262] but that does not

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[259] Kelsey, 2011, 85.
[260] *EE* 21.
[261] *EE* 296.
[262] *EE* 282.

reduce the quality of our relationship with God. Personal bodies are the glory of God.[263] Kelsey writes,

> Moreover, among the differing circumstances in which doxological gratitude may be expressed are circumstances of limited or diminished human powers. When certain of a personal body's powers do not develop as they normally do, or when they are lost, she may express doxological gratitude by other powers, perhaps without speaking at all…It is no distortion of her trust in and loyalty to the triune God when she ceases to express doxological gratitude by engaging in cooperative practices.[264]

Third, by moving away from ideas about the Imago Dei and the perfection of Adam and Eve in the Genesis creation story, Kelsey gets away from "some idealised notion of 'perfect' humanity."[265] In using the Wisdom literature, Kelsey writes, "imperfections of bodies in no way bring into question their actuality."[266] Kelsey concludes from his reading of Job, "there is no absolute standard for human physical, mental or emotional perfection."[267] Human dependence and neediness are "constitutive of creature-liness and not a failure."[268] Human beings are "deemed good by God precisely in their fragility, vulnerability and finitude."[269] This attitude can help to alleviate the stigma of dementia. Greggs adds:

> In the complexly secular and pluralist society of which we are a part, such a preparedness to engage with real, everyday humans is important for theological anthropology; and it brings with it important implications (theological and ethical) for engagements with, for example, differently abled humans, and even with issues relating to gender.[270]

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[263] *EE* 311.
[264] *EE* 345.
[265] Greggs, 459.
[266] *EE* 14.
[267] *EE* 303.
[268] *EE* 267.
[269] Plant, 371.
[270] Greggs, 459.

Fourth, in addition to Kelsey's view of humanity's uniqueness as being related to by God as the ultimate context, he holds that, on a physical level and in the proximate context, human uniqueness is not tied to a narrow definition of rationality. The elevation of rationality derives from the Hellenistic tradition. Kelsey appreciates in human neuro-physiology a host of other qualia and abilities: "sensation, feeling, emotion, awareness, self-awareness, and consciousness."[271] Some of these are probably not lost even in severe dementia.

Fifth, according to Kelsey, we have a vocation to care for "the quotidian," the daily world we are set in. Human beings are "dedicatedly active for the well-being of their every-day proximate contexts."[272] This includes care for others, including those in any of the classes discussed above, since others are so constitutive of who we are. We are all finite and living on "borrowed breath."[273] By this Kelsey means "the life of her living human body is borrowed in that her accountability to God for the way that life is lived as a response to God's creative relating to her puts her more in the position of a steward of a loan than that of an owner of a piece of property."[274] Faith in God "commit(s) the speaker to an array of attitudes (e.g., that fellow creatures are gifts), passions (e.g., of the well-being of fellow creatures), dispositions (e.g., in all circumstances to refer all things to God) that are appropriate responses to that which expresses God's glory."[275]

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[271] *EE* 540.
[272] *EE* 315.
[273] *EE* 309.
[274] *EE* 209.
[275] *EE* 311.

Sixth, Kelsey writes about the quality of life and flourishing. His account of flourishing stresses that it is not simply about having good health. He writes: "Flourishing human bodies are not the glory of God because they are healthily flourishing; theologically speaking, they are deemed flourishing to the extent that even in extreme unhealth, they are nonetheless in some mode (derivatively) the glory of God."[276] Expressing God's glory is what flourishing is about. "In short, personal bodies' identities flourish when their identities are radically eccentric,"[277] that is, not focused on themselves.

The next and last section is an attempt to work through implications of Kelsey's work in the area of dementia.

[276] *EE* 317.
[277] *EE* 718.

Section 5 begins with the stories from the beginning of the Preface and how they can be interpreted in the light of the work of this thesis. The case of dementia is briefly described. The problem with anthropology from some Christian and secular philosophers and theologians, as well as contemporary science, "our local culture," is that rationality is privileged. The goal is to work with science and theology together, not to resolve their differences, but to build on the wisdom of each to achieve a more balanced view of personhood, especially in the situation of dementia. Work in this area is encouraged as a way to change attitudes towards dementia, reducing stigma, and supporting those who advocate for those with dementia. This section concludes with questions for further study.

Section 5

1. Stories

Let us return now to the stories in the Preface. We have as a result of our over-valuing of rationality two scenarios where the outcomes could be said to be detrimental to the professional (clergy or doctor), the patient, the family and ultimately society at large. In the first story, a local parish clergyperson's visit to the hospital ended when two of his members were "so out of it" that he just said hello and left his card. By "out of it" it can be assumed that this meant the members were cognitively impaired in some way, perhaps temporarily or permanently. Being "out of it" could be interpreted to mean out of the mainstream world where everyday norms of rationality dominate. It does not mean "out of it" with respect to God, who is as present as ever, closer to the person than they are to themselves.

Finding his congregation's members in this state was apparently a surprise to the clergyperson. It could have been that the clergyperson felt upset at seeing the members in this state. He may have also felt anxiety, rising from his own fears of mortality or dependence. He may have rationalized that the members (being out of it) would not even know whether or not he tried to communicate beyond a simple

hello. A completely rational approach might lead one to believe it would make no difference if he attempted to communicate. In this view, talking to a person who is "out of it" would be like talking to a stone.

The patients were in a quite vulnerable state. They were alone. They might not have known their clergyperson was present (we can never be sure what they know). The opportunity was there for the clergyperson to try to communicate. Praying or reading Scripture or playing music might have enabled a connection. The attempt could have been beneficial for him, enabling him to strengthen his identity and vocation – his relationship with the quotidian for which he is accountable. It could have helped the patients who needed (perhaps desperately) connection for maintaining their identity as members of the community. Being in the hospital, their fear on some level was probably high. This type of connection would be very healing for them. Above all, it is not the people in this situation who are central, rather, God is central.

Maybe the clergyperson needed education about communicating with a patient when it is difficult. Surprising things can happen when one tries, things that can actually increase one's faith. Perhaps the clergyperson was pressured and in a rush and did not have the patience or emotional strength at this time to make the effort. A clergyperson cannot always succeed at such opportunities, as they are, as we say, "only human," meaning fragile, finite and vulnerable themselves.

In the second story, a doctor's behavior in front of the patient, who has severe dementia, and in front of the family, reflected a dehumanizing ethic. The patient was treated disrespectfully as if inanimate. The doctor was making

assumptions based on his logic that the patient could not understand words being said or tones being used, and he felt free to hold a sensitive conversation about hospice decisions in the presence of the patient as if she were not there. His question to the family, "what are you keeping her alive for?" reveals his sense that it is we who choose to "keep alive" or not, rather than being something of divinity. Before the family could object, he moved to the patient and in mockery said, "what do you do for fun, Jane?" Knowing that she could not answer, he was trying to make a point to the family that her quality of life is low. In fact the patient grimaced, registering displeasure.

It could be that the doctor was projecting his own anxiety about loss of control. His rational approach was that if he cannot have life on his own terms ("having fun"), it is not worth living. But the patient was not alone; the family was there. The opportunity existed for the doctor to be empathetic to the patient and the family, all of whom were stressed about the hospital visit. He could also have provided helpful advice to the family (in private) based on his medical knowledge. The interaction could have been beneficial for him, enabling him to strengthen his identity and vocation – his relationship with the quotidian for which he is accountable. It could have benefitted the patient and her children, who had been struggling with the illness for many years. He had no basis for judging her quality of life, being unaware of the ultimate context of her illness and that she is a beloved child of God. Further, he appeared to be unaware of his own status as a beloved child of God. It is not the people who are central, rather, God is central. The doctor's discomfort was not the issue. The love in the room was the issue.

2. Dementia

Dementia is progressive mental deterioration including loss of memory, judgment, language, complex motor skills, and other intellectual functions caused by the permanent damage or death of the brain's neurons. Dementia is caused by various diseases, with Alzheimer's Disease accounting for 60-80%. Protein-based plaques and tangles build up in certain areas of the brain, killing neurons and severing connections. In Alzheimer's, the first area affected is the hippocampus, which is why the primary symptom is usually short-term memory loss. As the plaques and tangles accumulate in other areas, other symptoms develop in a roughly predictable pattern through early, middle and late stages of the illness. It is not true that the entire brain becomes damaged. A widely circulated Facebook post about Alzheimer's states "Imprisoned in one's own rapidly shrinking brain is how a doctor described it to me."[278] This kind of misinformation only elevates the stigma and fear of dementia.

We cannot presume to know what people with dementia are experiencing at any of the stages. They can respond to music to a surprising degree even into the late stage, perhaps because the area for long-term musical memory is not typically damaged with Alzheimer's.[279] We cannot know for sure, but in observing the effects of dementia in a loved one who we know well, we may be able to tell that their self is still there and their spirituality is still active. The distribution of the "self"

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[278] Forum Chat and Q&As, Alzheimer's Society, https://forum.alzheimers.org.uk/showthread.php?92887-Inaccurate-rubbish, viewed 15-Apr-17.

[279] Jorn-Henrik Jacobsen et al. "Why musical memory can be preserved in advanced Alzheimer's disease" *Brain* 138 (2015) 2438–2450.

throughout the brain as discussed in Section 2 is broad, and because there is no one part of the brain that is the "self," it is not possible for dementia to destroy it. Because there is no one part of the brain that is responsible for spirituality, it is possible that spirituality can survive dementia.

Speaking scientifically, the illnesses that cause dementia are illnesses of the brain, no more and no less. We would not stigmatize other illnesses, such as that of the heart or kidneys, so we should not stigmatize dementia.

3. The problem with rationality-centered anthropology

The argument in this thesis is that the over-valuing of rationality in Western culture has distorted our view of personhood, especially as applied in the case of dementia.[280] Our modern attitude stressing rationality over other human attributes gifted by God stems at least in part from earlier Christian theologians and secular philosophers, from ancient Greece through the Enlightenment and modern eras. Both theological doctrines of soul and Imago Dei served theological anthropology for millennia but also did the work of building in a bias towards rationality. This has contributed detrimentally through stigma associated with the illnesses causing dementia, resulting in countless unfortunate stories, some tragic and some subtler like the ones above.

The concept of the soul stemmed from Hellenistic philosophy and by the time of Descartes became identified with the rational mind as the basis for being human. If the soul is how God relates to us, and rationality is the most important part of the

[280] Post, 3.

soul, then when rationality declines, it might imply that God cannot relate to us as well. This is an unacceptable conclusion. We still fall into the Cartesian idea that the rational part, thinking, defines the human person. There are many ways, however, that we fail to be in charge of our bodies. It is an inherent fragility that we disintegrate through "what individual human beings suffer and what they do."[281]

I agree with Kelsey that science is part of our proximate context. In the following two sections, I try to work with science and theology together, not to resolve their differences, but to build on the wisdom of each to achieve a more balanced view of personhood, especially in the situation of dementia.

4. Science-how does it transform the approach?

On the one hand, we can be wary of reductionistic materialism that the modern secular interpretation of humanity often presents, as discussed in Section 2. A very deep problem with the materialist view is that it implies all actions are wholly predictable, including one's thoughts and acts. This is contrary to our subjective experience that we are free to direct our lives. As Keith Ward writes, "our conscious processes often seem to be causally primary."[282]

Another problem with reductionistic materialism is that it does not account for the qualia of experience, the person's subjective experience associated with stimulation to the brain. Norden writes, "it is challenging to examine why

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[281] *EE* 286.
[282] Keith Ward, *By Faith and Reason: The Essential Keith Ward*, Wm. Curtis Holtzen and Roberto Sirvent (eds.) Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Pub. (2012), 155.

consciousness appears to be 'something' that is happening to a 'me.'"[283] Since we all have this experience, any theory should provide an explanation for it. Further, the laws of physics do not explain what the universe – or life - is for, what it means or why it exists in the first place.[284]

In contemplating Figure 1 in Section 2, it is not clear that there are no fundamental gaps between these levels. Ward discusses *emergence from complexity* - the possibility that beyond "simple and general (physical) laws, more complex structures come into existence, with correspondingly more complex patterns of interactions between them."[285] The interactions in the brain "generate new, emergent properties (of consciousness) and correspondingly new and unpredictable forms of response (in terms of desire and purpose),"[286] whose states are unpredictable from the laws of physics. Conscious states, Ward says, are not merely epiphenomena of the brain but will "modify radically the nature of the system."[287]

At a specific point in time, "a subject of rational consciousness comes into being."[288] This could be imagined as during a fetus's development or in the evolution of the human species. Ward summarizes, "Thus the physical structure of the central nervous system and the brain causes the genesis of one continuous subject of experiences, which then interacts in responsible and purposive ways with its

[283] Norden, 25.
[284] Ward, 152.
[285] Ward, 153.
[286] Ward, 153.
[287] Ward, 154.
[288] Ward, 154.

material environment, through its own material properties."[289] Kelsey puts it this way: we are "complex enough to be given over, in some measure, into our own charge."[290] Ward calls this soul, but because of the connotations of that word, I prefer the accounts of Nancey Murphy and David Kelsey. It is a special human trait but, like them, I would not call it soul. The word soul conjures Augustine's version as a thing not arising from the body, rather a separate entity given by God upon conception or birth, surviving death and consummated at the eschaton. After reading Murphy, Kelsey and Oscar Cullmann[291] about the eschaton, I favor resurrection of the body rather than a soul that continues after death. As Paul writes, "It is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual." (1 Cor 15:41-58) I agree with Kelsey that, rather than a soul, it is our stories that hold our identities together over time. God can relate to us through our personal body. We are resurrected at the eschaton as a whole person, rather than having an immortal soul. This allows a unitive view of the human, with our particular capabilities that set us apart from animals attributed to our very complex neurophysiology. It is the enormous capacity of the human brain, the microscopic study of which has been appreciated only recently, that makes human beings unique among the animal world.

A reductionist secular view can rely on other factors for its values, but there is a danger that morals could be based on utilitarianism, which leads to ethical conclusions that many find undesirable, as we saw in Section 4 with Peter Singer.

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[289] Ward, 161.
[290] *EE* 286.
[291] Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of Testament," in *Immortality and Resurrection: Four Essays*, New York: Macmillan Co, 1955, p. 9-53.

The nonreductionist view is consistent with the existence of a divine being. For Christians, this divine being is a personal God, in personal relationship with humans, establishing morals. Murphy writes that we have the capacity for religious experiences by virtue of culture and our complex neural systems (both given to us by God).[292] Our bodies and brains are the vehicles that establish us human beings for God's relating to us, which makes us persons.

Discoveries about the brain are revolutionizing our understanding of human potential. The ability to do measurements as humans think, experience emotions, and have spiritual experiences is changing the way we view ourselves. Appreciating that our whole body is involved neuropsychoimmunologically in these processes also helps us to appreciate our incarnation, our whole being, getting us "out of our heads." Making decisions, for example, involves much more than just the rational thinking parts of the brain.[293] Qualities such as emotion, instinct, love and spirituality are just as important in making us human.

5. Theology – how does it transform the approach?

David Kelsey's theology of personhood takes into account a more balanced view of our Triune God's relation to humans and humans' relation to God and each other. The basis for the value and relationship of the human being lies in God, that is, outside the human beings themselves. Kelsey's central tenet is that human beings are what they are because of God relating to them. I agree with him that personhood

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[292] Murphy, 5.
[293] Joshua Greene, et al. *An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment*, Science (2001) 293: 2105-2108.

is “a status before God” dependent on God’s relating to who I am (a vertical orientation) and others’ relating to who I am (a horizontal orientation.) Using criteria for humanity such as rationality, language or being self-determining is too narrow a definition. God is in the center, and human beings are outside the center, i.e. eccentric. God relates to us by three ways: in a constant flow of creation that sustains us, by drawing us to an eschatological ending where we are redeemed and made new, and by reconciling us, through Christ, when we become alienated. This broader view is most welcome.

Secondly, the community is accountable to maintain the quotidian identity of the person in the proximate context. We are accountable to God for a fitting response to the ways God has related to us and whereby we take care of the everyday world and the people in it. Relationships with other creatures in our daily lives are critical. Our identities are partly formed by them, and we also help construct others’ identities as well. Our neediness of others is no failure but part of being a finite creature. If others are needy we should view this as them helping us to be accountable. We should do what we can to enable them to still be accountable to God and their neighbors as far as possible as well.

Kelsey’s theological anthropology does the work of re-establishing the balance that can include those previously treated as other, such as the disabled and those with dementia. God’s relating is not lost in dementia or any illness; rather, our ultimate context is that God seeks us more than we seek God. Barth calls this an “overflow”, matching God’s essence. Our “creaturely ontological integrity” (Kelsey) and “human constitution” (Barth) are not lost even with severe dementia, since that

integrity is a function of God relating to us. We are the glory of God, even if mute or lacking rationality. The most fundamental things about us are our basic personal identity as grounded in God. It is not our quotidian identity, which embraces our sex, ability, gender, health status, etc. That we do not say we are the Image of God primarily, allows us to avoid the trap that "our body-stories have deviated away from imaging God and are therefore pathological."[294] Further, Job's creation story emphasizes that his status is not dependent upon actualizing his capacities and powers, "nor can it be taken away by any failure to actualize his capacities and exercise his powers appropriately."[295] Additionally, the "imperfections of … bodies in no way bring into question their actuality."[296] Job's status is permanent. Kelsey concludes from his reading of Job, "there is no absolute standard for human physical, mental or emotional perfection."[297]

Jesus is the perfect human Imago Dei, and we learn from his wounds and disability from the cross that nothing like an illness or what makes us other detracts from our humanity. We do not say for a minute that Jesus was less of a human or less of a person on the cross. Jesus as the transforming of the idea of personhood, broken, disabled on the cross, reveals that full personhood is compatible with disability.

This approach is preferable to equating one capacity of the human person, rationality, with the image of God, which would imply that if rationality is not present, the image is damaged or destroyed. In Wisdom literature, we see "human

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[294] Cornwall, 115.
[295] *EE* 300.
[296] *EE* 301.
[297] *EE* 303.

beings as fragile, vulnerable and finite – and deemed good by God precisely in their fragility, vulnerability and finitude."[298]

Recalling from 1 Cor 13:12 Paul writes, "For now we see in a mirror dimly…" On the very large scale of the differences between God and humans, people with dementia are only a small bit more blurred than the rest of us. We are all blurred and not that different from each other. Song reminds us, "the common calling in Christ which disabled and non-disabled share with each other categorically transcends whatever differences they may have from each other."[299] If all humans are 'blurred images" as Augustine suggested, having dementia does not blur us that much. With dementia, we are still a person. We have a narrative that maintains our identity. We have relationships that also maintain our identity. We are still the complexity in unity and unity in complexity. God continues to actively relate to us. Dementia is a brain disease, nothing more and nothing less. The brain is still operating in a fierce way. Billions of pieces of information: vision, hearing, smells, touch and taste, are still being transmitted, perhaps not as well as before but usually still working. Still there is suffering associated with dementia as with any illness; we realize that having a human living body is a mixed blessing.

With dementia, it is the community that holds the quotidian identity of the person in the proximate context. Accepting a person with a disability asserts what Song called the "foundational solidity and non-negotiable presence of disabled people's lives, and therefore *of all human lives*."[300] This is how we respond in faith,

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[298] Plant, 371.
[299] Song, 243.
[300] Song, 242 (italics mine).

hope and love. At the same time, we have to honor the sense of loss and grief of the person with dementia and the family. It is a pain worthy of our grief.

6. Conclusion

The lens of science and theology together with stories can help us understand the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of dementia. There is a nascent literature on the theology of dementia that will inform this work in its next phase.[301,302,303,304,305] Hopefully education about dementia will eventually shift some of the focus about the illness from devastation, dehumanization, and loss to one of maintaining selfhood, coping and some of the spiritual gifts that come from any challenge before us.

What do we understand about the stages of the diseases that cause dementia and what is happening in the brain? What is the subjective experience like? Whether a person identifies as a person of faith or an atheist or in between, does dementia have an impact on this aspect of their identity? How can we use these insights for better care, better advocacy for people with dementia, and for improving end-of-life decisions? What more does it teach us about personhood and deeper things of God?

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[301] John Swinton, *Dementia : Living in the Memories of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012.
[302] David Keck, *Forgetting Whose We Are: Alzheimer's Disease and the Love of God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
[303] Peter Kevern, "Sharing the mind of Christ: preliminary thoughts on dementia and the Cross," *New Blackfriars*, 91: 1034 (2010) 408-422.
[304] Susan H. McFadden and John T. McFadden, *Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship and Flourishing Communities*, Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press (2011).
[305] See special issues, John Swinton and Elizabeth MacKinlay (guest eds.) *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, 28: 1-4 (2016).

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