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# What are we? Collective neuroscience, metaphysics, and theology

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## Abstract

Human beings are a highly social species, and there are neural systems that have a role in enabling human beings to function as the social animals they are. They connect people into smaller or larger social groups; and at least some of these groups have a unity that lets the united human beings function as one. That this is so has implications for an array of philosophical and theological issues, including the notion of a people, the concomitant notions of a people's communal guilt and communal shame, the notion of the church as the body of Christ, the understanding of human perfection as a likeness to a triune God, and many other such issues. What is required to elucidate these issues is a metaphysics that can explain the nature of a united something-or-other that includes human persons as constituents. This article explores these issues and outlines the nature of the needed metaphysics.

**Keywords:** social ontology; group agency; union; communal guilt; collective neuroscience

## Introduction

In this article, I want to call attention to a puzzle about what we are, but I will not be able to solve it. This article is therefore an exercise in the *via negativa*, but for philosophy rather than for theology. I will sketch the *quid est* of the thing I want to understand, namely, what we are, largely by illustrating what it is not. In what follows, the successive attempts to capture it constitute at best explanations that are not complete or accurate.

To begin to see the puzzle, consider the prayer of Daniel. In the biblical book that bears his name, Daniel makes a prayer of confession on behalf of his people. It includes these claims: '*we have sinned; we have gone astray; we have acted wickedly; we have been rebellious and have deviated from your commandments and your rules*' (9:5).[1] These are expressions of guilt; but there is also an expression of shame: '*shame is on us to this very day, on the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all Israel, near and far*' (9:7).

These claims framed in the first-person plural have to be taken as true in the story. That is, it would make gibberish of the story to suppose that Daniel is addressing statements to God that in the story are false. Before this point, Daniel is presented as entirely pleasing to God; and in the immediately following part of the story, Daniel is rewarded for his prayer by a special divine revelation. Furthermore, for those who are familiar with this biblical text, these statements are unremarkable; that is, they do not obviously call out for explanation

as perplexingly false in the story. And yet the story makes clear that Daniel himself has not been guilty of any disobedience against God; on the contrary, he was willing to die rather than transgress even one of God's commandments. He has no shame either. He is the third person in power, authority, and honour in the entire kingdom. So the puzzle arises because it seems that in the story Daniel's first-person plural claims of guilt and shame also have to be false.

Of course, there are a variety of cases in which claims made with the first-person plural pronoun are true even though the claims do not apply to every member of the group picked out by the pronoun.[2] So, for example, we say such things as 'like other mammals, we bear our young alive'. In such cases, whatever the referent of 'we' is, it is clear that the property attributed to that referent does not apply to every member of the group in question. There are even cases in which a property attributed to a whole group indicates communal guilt although not every member of the group shares that guilt. So, for example, we can say 'the St. Louis-based Doe Run Company causes lead poisoning of children in Peru' without implying that every employee of the Doe Run Company is causing that lead poisoning. It is for this reason that assessing legal responsibility in such instances can be a complex matter.[3]

But it is hard to construe the first-person plural claims of guilt and shame in Daniel's prayer in this way, because by making them in his prayer in his own voice, Daniel seems to be confessing his own guilt and shame as well as that of his people. Consider what we generally think is needed for a person's expression of such a first-person plural claim to be true. Suppose that Hannah and Miriam have promised to feed Tom's cat while Tom is gone for the day. As it happens, however, Hannah is called away for the day too; and Miriam, who is the only one home with the cat, forgets to feed the cat. Then suppose that when Tom comes home and Miriam realizes her error, Miriam tries to apologize to Tom for this negligence by telling him, "We are so sorry! We forgot to feed your cat." Hannah will certainly correct her. "No," she will tell Miriam, "YOU forgot to feed the cat." It is clear that Hannah is justified in this correction of Miriam's claim. When Miriam says, "We forgot to feed your cat", the claim is false because only Miriam forgot; Hannah remembered but had turned the cat-feeding over to Miriam, and Miriam forgot. Consequently, in the story, it seems that somehow Daniel says truly to God what are apparently false claims when expressed by Daniel: "we have been rebellious and have deviated from your commandments and your rules; shame is on us to this very day.[4]

What is the we Daniel is referring to?[5]

The helpful ArtScroll Tanakh volume on Daniel, which provides useful summaries of generations of Jewish commentary on the text, has virtually nothing to say about the first person plural character of Daniel's claims of guilt and shame.[6] An early Christian writer, Hippolytus, notes them but defuses them by transposing them into the third-personal. Hippolytus comments that Daniel was declaring the sins of the people and *their* fathers.[7] The Patristic writer Jerome recognizes the first-person plural character of Daniel's claims, but he dismisses them. He says:

> '[Daniel] reviews the sins of the people as if he were personally guilty, on the ground of his being one of the people'.[8]

And the great Jewish scholar Saadia Gaon says something similar; he supposes that Daniel is acting in the role usually held by a priest and so is speaking just as a voice for the people,[9] as distinct from confessing his own sins.[10]

One might suppose that Saadia is here understanding the Jewish people roughly in the way some contemporary philosophers understand groups and the agency of groups. So, for

example, some philosophers have argued that a belief can be attributed to a group even if it cannot be attributed to every member of the group as long as some suitably appointed spokesperson for the group accepts the belief on behalf of the group.[11] The problem with approaching Daniel's prayer in this sort of way is that at the end of his prayer Daniel emphasizes that he was confessing his own sins also. He says:

> 'I was speaking and praying and confessing *my* sin and the sin of my people Israel' (Dan. 9:20)

Furthermore, part of the point of Daniel's making this confession is to acknowledge that the suffering of Daniel's people does not impugn the goodness of God because that suffering is consequent on the sin Daniel is confessing. Since the suffering of Daniel's people affects each of them, it seems as if the confessed guilt and shame are being attributed to each of them also.[12]

For these reasons, although the story makes clear that Daniel is not guilty of disobeying God's commands or rebelling against God's laws, even so in the story the first-person plural claims of Daniel's confession of guilt have to be taken as true. And something analogous must be said about his claim that 'shame is on *us* to this very day'. In the story, this first-person plural claim must be true too even though Daniel himself has great honour in his community.

I have called attention to the case of Daniel's prayer because it is so clear an example of the puzzle I want to explore; but there are many other such cases in the Hebrew Bible, and some of them are even more egregious in their use of apparently true first-person plural expressions to make apparently false claims.[13] Consider, for example, what Moses says to the Israelites right before they cross the Jordan River and make their first entrance into the Holy Land. In Deuteronomy, in a powerful last speech before he dies, which in the story could not possibly be supposed to contain false claims, Moses says to the people,

> Has any people ever heard the voice of God speaking out of a fire, as you have, and survived? (4:33) ... . The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today. Face to face the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire. (5:2–4) When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, you came to me, ... and said, 'The Lord our God has shown us his majestic presence, and we have heard his voice out of the fire.' (5:23–24).

But in the story the people to whom Moses is saying these things actually did not hear God's voice in the events Moses is alluding to. That is because God was angry with the Israelites who *did* hear God's voice and as punishment decreed that those people would wander for 40 years in the wilderness until all of them had died. None of them were permitted to enter the Holy Land (Num. 14:20–35). In the story, the Israelites who were listening to Moses as they were about to cross Jordan and enter the Holy Land are the children of the people who heard God's voice. Who then is the *us* with whom God made a covenant and talked face to face and who are now going to enter the Holy Land? What is the referent of the first-person plural?

## A broader problem: union in love

In thinking about this question and its analogues, it is helpful to see that an answer to the question cannot be the sort of thing philosophers have in mind in discussing group epistemology, for example. In such discussions, a group is typically thought of as a collection of individuals who may cooperate in some more or less conglomerate way, but who do not have

a deep metaphysical unity. The puzzle in the cases canvassed above, however, presupposes that human beings can be not just collected into one or another grouping, but that they can in fact be united into one. A solution to the puzzle requires finding a *this something*[14] – a subsisting concrete particular – which is nonetheless composed of more than one person.[15]

Aquinas accepts what he takes to be a fundamental claim of Aristotelian hylomorphism, namely, that no substance is composed of substances;[16] and an analogue to this view seems to underlie at least some contemporary metaphysics too. For example, in his discussion of material beings, Peter van Inwagen examines certain methods of composition that might be thought capable of unifying two things into one material being. With regard to each of these possible methods of composition, Van Inwagen asks whether that method could unify two human beings into one material being; and in every case it is clear that the method of composition in question fails the test.[17] But on the Aristotelian metaphysics adopted by Aquinas and still discernible in some western philosophy, *nothing* could unify two human beings into one material being. There is no place in this metaphysics for entities that are one subsisting concrete particular and yet are composed of more than one person.[18]

For that matter, there is no place in this metaphysics for entities that are one subsisting concrete particular such as a human being and yet are also composed of multiple other organisms including bacteria and viruses, a point some philosophers take to be evidence in support of process metaphysics. For example, John Dupre says,

> What is an organism? ... It has become common to refer to a multicellular organism together with all its symbiotic partners as a holobiont. ... But many symbionts are recruited from the environment. ... [For this reason] holobionts are not lineage forming; and if they are not lineage forming, it appears that they are not the individuals that evolved. This problem is, it seems to me, unanswerable in a world of things. ... But recognising that we live in a world of process offers a straightforward way out.[19]

Aquinas struggled with an analogous issue with regard to the incarnation of Christ.[20] On the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation, there is just one person in Christ, namely, the second person of the Trinity; but included in the components of the incarnate Christ are both the second person of the Trinity and also a human soul and a human body which would compose a human person if they existed together outside of the incarnate Christ. Aristotelian metaphysics provides a limited number of ways in which components can come together to compose one material being. There is union in nature, in which differing components are united into the one nature conferred by a substantial form. There is the union of an accident with the supposit in which it inheres. And then there is the union by which a substantial form comes together with the matter it configures to form one material supposit.[21] But, clearly, none of these modes of union can be the mode which unites things into one material being when some of the things being united are persons or would be persons if they were taken apart from the whole. So, with regard to the incarnation, Aquinas thinks that we have to grant that the mode of union of the components of the incarnate Christ is in a certain respect incomprehensible.[22] He says, 'to explain this union perfectly is not possible for human beings'.[23]

But what manner of composition *could* unify two or more persons into one entity? It is worth noticing that a version of the problem Aquinas flags with regard to the incarnation in fact arises also with regard to the ordinary mode of uniting that binds two human beings together in love. In his somewhat satirical poem on love, John Donne expresses the commonplace idea that romantic love can effect union between two human beings by means of the coupling of their minds. As Donne describes it, 'Love these mix'd souls doth mix again and makes both one, each this and that.'[24] On this description, the union of romantic love

seems to depend on a kind of melding of minds reminiscent of the scientifically discredited notion of telepathy.

And something analogous can be said with regard to other kinds of human love too. Consider, for example, the relation between an infant and its primary caregiver. This is typically also a binding together in love; and when (for whatever reason) it is seriously impaired or absent, its absence can give rise to one or another degree of autism spectrum disorder.[25] Trying to summarize his own research on one of these sources for the development of autism, Peter Hobson says that it is possible for autism to arise 'because of a disruption in the system of child-in-relation-to-others'.[26] By way of explanation, he says:

> my experience [as a researcher] of autism has convinced me that such a system [of child-in-relation-to-others] not only exists, but also takes charge of the intellectual growth of the infant. Central to mental development is a psychological system that is greater and more powerful than the sum of its parts. The parts are the caregiver and her infant; the system is what happens when they act and feel in concert. The combined operation of infant-in-relation-to-caregiver is a motive force in development, and it achieves wonderful things. When it does not exist, and the motive force is lacking, the whole of mental development is terribly compromised.[27]

On Hobson's views, the phenomenon of autism cannot be fully explained without the notion of a union of mind of some sort between an infant and its primary caregiver. This is a union which is some one thing that has within it, as components of some sort, two or more human beings. But what is this 'infant-in-relation-to-caregiver', and what enables its operation? Here too it can look as if we would have to resort to scientifically discredited notions such as the notion of telepathy to explain the nature of the one thing in question and its operation.

In his *Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis gives an evocative characterization of the difficulty of explaining the metaphysics of union among persons. In Lewis's book, a senior devil mentors a junior devil and tries to show him what the senior devil takes to be the complete lack of logic in God's notion of love. Lewis has the senior devil say:

> The whole philosophy of Hell rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another thing, and, specially, that one self is not another self. My good is my good, and your good is yours. What one gains another loses. Even an inanimate object is what it is by excluding all other objects from the space it occupies; if it expands, it does so by thrusting other objects aside or by absorbing them. A self does the same. With us the absorption takes the form of eating; for us, it means the sucking of the will and freedom out of a weaker self into a stronger. ... Now, the Enemy's philosophy is nothing more nor less than one continued attempt to evade this very obvious truth. He aims at a contradiction. Things are to be many, yet somehow also one. The good of one self is to be the good of another. This impossibility he calls *Love* ... He is not content, even himself, to be a sheer arithmetical unity; He claims to be three as well as one, in order that this nonsense about Love may find a foothold in his own nature.[28]

Here the point is not that postulating union among persons requires resort to scientifically discredited notions such as telepathy but that in fact it requires contraventions of basic laws of logic.

So the puzzle posed by the use of the first-person plural in Daniel's prayer and in Moses's speech to the Israelites entering the Holy Land highlights a problem arising from any attempt to find a *this something* – one something-or-other that is a subsisting concrete

particular – and yet has more than one person constituent within it. What kind of thing could this be?

This is a straightforwardly metaphysical question; but the metaphysics to which we are accustomed seems to reject the very question as ill-formed, so that some philosophers suppose the question should be dealt with only phenomenologically[29] or only by means of process philosophy.[30] In these circumstances, because I *am* interested in the metaphysics, I propose to explore possible answers to the question with two different approaches.[31]

The first makes use of some new developments within what is now being called 'collective neuroscience'. The neuroscience is helpful because it suggests that there could be a naturalistic scientific explanation for the kind of connection that would enable union between human beings, so that neither telepathy nor any other as-it-were magic has to be postulated as the mechanism enabling it.

And the second approach looks to Christian theology for elucidation. The theology is helpful because it suggests that the potentiality for union among human beings is founded in human nature itself and represents at least in part the image of God in human beings.

But though taken together these approaches seem to me to indicate a direction that might be profitable for finding a satisfying answer to the question 'What are *we*?', neither of these approaches is anything more than suggestive. As I explained at the outset, in this article I have no solution to offer to the puzzle exemplified by Daniel's prayer.

## Collective neuroscience

We can begin with the neuroscience. In the past few decades, research in neuroscience has elucidated what is now called 'the mirror neuron system'.[32] The mirror neuron system makes it possible for one person to have a kind of direct and immediate knowledge of some of the mental states of another person. This kind of knowledge shares something of the phenomenology of perception, and it has become common to refer to it as 'mind-reading'. Like the perception of colour, for example, the knowledge of persons in mind-reading is intuitive and hard to translate without remainder into knowledge *that* (but very useful as a basis for knowledge *that* of one sort or another).[33] Neurons in the mirror neuron system contribute to making the knowledge of mind-reading possible because they can fire both when one does some action oneself or has some emotion oneself and also when one sees that same action or emotion in someone else.

The point is easier to appreciate if we focus on empathy with another person's pain,[34] which is currently also thought to be a result of the mind-reading cognitive capacities subserved at least in part by the mirror neuron system.[35] When Paula sees Jerome impale his bare foot on a nail in the garden, she knows he is in pain because (to one extent or another) *she* feels *his* pain; and she does so at least in part because her mirror neuron system produces in Paula an affective state that has at least some of the characteristics of the pain Jerome is experiencing.[36] Paula does not actually suffer physical pain resulting from a laceration in her tissues; but, in her empathy with Jerome, she has some kind of feeling of pain. Only, in Paula, that feeling is taken off-line,[37] as it were, because, as she is aware, in her it is not connected to tissue damage in the body, as it is in Jerome.

It may help here to notice that the neural mechanisms for empathy and for mind-reading more generally are in some respects like some of the neural mechanisms employed in dreaming. If Paula dreams that she is running, her brain will fire some of those motor programs it would fire if she were in fact running; but it will fire them off-line, so that there is no muscle movement in Paula's legs even while her brain is firing the motor programs usually used to produce that muscle movement. In a similar way, through the mirror neuron system, in empathy with Jerome Paula can have a mental state that is the same as or similar to a mental state in Jerome when he impales his foot on a nail, but without Paula's brain's

actually producing all the other brain states it would have produced in Paula if Paula had impaled her own foot on a nail.

In her empathy with Jerome, the mental state of Jerome's that is shared by Paula really is Paula's. But, unlike the mental state of Jerome's that Paula is sharing, Paula's mental state is not accompanied by the states of will and intellect this mental state has in Jerome. For example, in empathy with Jerome, Paula may mind-read Jerome's feeling of pain, and then Paula will feel some pain too. That pain will really be Paula's; but Paula will not believe that it is her foot that is hurt, she will not want medical attention for her foot, and so on. She will not have the states of intellect or will that Jerome has because of the pain in his foot. In the case of dreamed motion, when the brain's motor programs for running are firing, they are disconnected from the muscles in the legs and so do not produce actual running. In the case of empathy, the brain's mirror neuron system runs at least some of the programs it would run if Paula were feeling what Jerome is feeling; but it runs them disconnected from those states of will and intellect Paula would have if in fact she were in Jerome's state.

In this way, Paula shares some of Jerome's feelings but without having them as Jerome has them; instead, she has her own states of intellect and will, not Jerome's, even while she feels at least some of what she would feel if she were suffering what Jerome is suffering. In addition, even though in empathy Paula feels pain that is her pain, in the sense that the pain is in her and she herself feels it, she nonetheless recognizes that this is primarily Jerome's pain rather than hers. It is caused in Jerome (but not in her) by damage to bodily tissues; and without Jerome's pain, she would not have had the pain she does. The final result of the neural interactions begun by the mirror neuron system is that Paula knows *that* Jerome is in pain; but she knows this because, in consequence of the mirror neuron system, she first knows Jerome's pain.[38]

One researcher on mind-reading, Vittorio Gallese, tries to explain the relevant neural mechanisms involved in empathy this way:

> [brain systems] map ... multimodal representation across different spaces inhabited by different actors. These spaces are blended within a unified common intersubjective space, which paradoxically does not segregate any subject. This space is *"we"centric ...* The shared intentional space underpinned by the mirror matching mechanism is not meant to distinguish the agent from the observer.[39]

Philosophers have sometimes referred to the correlative conjoined mental acts as intersubjective or social acts of mind. For example, trying to explain Reid's account of social acts of mind, Richard Moran says:

> What Reid's formulation provides is an emphasis on the *acts* of intersubjectivity, ... rather than conceiving of ... [intersubjectivity] as a condition or access of one mind to another or as overcoming the boundaries between one mind and another.[40]

In the mind-reading of empathy enabled by the mirror neuron system, one person has a kind of intuitive awareness, somewhat analogous to an act of perception, of the thought, affect, and intention in the mind of another person. And so the neural engineering that includes the mirror neuron system enables a certain kind of limited intermingling of minds.

But this relatively recent work on mirror neurons is only the beginning of what is now a growing branch of neuroscience called 'collective neuroscience', and it includes research showing that the brain has systems for connecting human beings in even more complicated social patterns than the mirror neuron system alone enables.[41]

Consider, for example, this experiment. A person Jerome was put in an fMRI scanner in one city, and another person Paula who was a stranger to Jerome was put in another fMRI scanner in a different city. Jerome and Paula were then connected only by sound. Jerome was given 30 seconds in which to begin telling a story, which Paula could hear.[42] The story then went to Paula, who had another 30 seconds to continue the story, which Jerome heard. Then Jerome had a further 30 seconds to continue the story, and so on. The scientists doing the experiment found that although at the beginning of the experiment the brain waves of Jerome and Paula were very different, their brain waves quickly synchronized and converged as the two of them made up their joint story.

In a recent article presenting this new research, Lydia Denworth says:

'When people are not interacting socially, their individual brain waves are quite different ... . But when they think, feel and act in response to others, patterns of activity in their brains align.'[43]

This phenomenon is being called 'interbrain synchrony', and scientists are now discovering that it can be found also among other species of animals that live socially, including, for example, bats.
As Denworth explains interbrain synchrony among humans:

Neurons in the different brains [of interacting people] fire simultaneously – and as the interaction continues, the timing and location of brain activity become more and more alike. The extent of synchrony indicates the strength of a relationship, with brain-wave patterns matching particularly well between close friends or an effective teacher and their students.[44]

Interbrain synchrony is of course a sub-personal process, but it seems to be involved in generating a kind of cognition that underlies certain social activities. One group of researchers sum up their findings on interbrain synchrony this way:

Brain activities supporting human social interactions have recently become an important topic of scientific inquiry ... Considerable research indicates that synchronized neuronal activity in perception and action ... and oscillatory couplings between cortical and muscle activities during voluntary movement ... are among the mechanisms supporting brain-body-world interactions ... A substantial part of these interactions consists in synchronized goal-directed actions involving two or more individuals ... In everyday life, people often need to coordinate their actions with that of others. Some common examples are walking with someone at a set pace, playing collective sports or fighting ..., dancing ..., playing music in a duet or group ..., and a wide range of social bonding behaviors (e.g., eye-gaze coordination between mother and infant or between partners).[45]

The new work in collective neuroscience on interbrain synchrony shows that what we learned from the earlier work on mirror neurons is only the beginning of our understanding of the brain's mechanisms for social cognition and social agency. Like the mirror neuron system, the neurological mechanisms involved in interbrain synchrony play a part in enabling a kind of direct and immediate cognitive contact with the feelings and intentions of other human beings, and they do so in a way that generates 'synchronized goal-directed actions' among individuals. Interbrain synchrony seems to provide a kind of cognition that can coordinate sports players and dancers and musicians in their respective activities. If

mind-reading is a reasonable way to refer to the cognition enabled by the mirror neuron system, then maybe mind-melding is a reasonable way to refer to at least some of the cognitive states produced through interbrain synchrony.

We can distinguish mind-melding in this naturalistic sense from its fictional near neighbor which is a kind of bringing two minds into one without enabling them simultaneously to remain two.[46] As depicted in the popular Star Trek series, the Borg results from a uniting of persons that produces a hive mind, called 'the Collective'. In the fictional story, that uniting produces one mind in which there is only one consciousness that all the minds assimilated into the Collective share. This is a kind of uniting analogous to the uniting in Van Inwagen's thought experiments about uniting two human beings into one material being. In both the case of the Borg and the cases rejected in Van Inwagen's thought experiments, the uniting is meant to take two (or more) things and through some method of composition turn them into just one thing.[47] But the kind of uniting of minds now being researched in the new branch of collective neuroscience is a mind-melding that somehow unites minds to one extent or another in one or another activity while leaving each mind in the union intact in its individual consciousness.[48]

Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the unity at issue apparently meets one of the criteria for an Aristotelian substance. On Aristotelian metaphysics, function follows form; that is, the form configuring components into one composite substance gives the whole substance a power which is not had by the components of the whole when they are taken *singulatim*, in isolation from the whole. The water molecule has the power to form hydrogen bonds, for example; but this is a power that its components, hydrogen and oxygen, do not have when they are taken as individual atoms apart from the whole molecule. Analogously, the mind-melding enabled by the relevant neural systems grants the people connected together a power for simultaneous mutual awareness of the sort exemplified by jazz improvisation, for example; and this is a power that they would not have or would not have as fully otherwise, if (for example) they were simply located together playing instruments in the same place but without being in the mind-melding condition. Furthermore, when the relevant neural systems fail to function in their typical way, the diminished power for awareness of another can impair some kinds of typical human functioning, as is evident, for example, from the current research on one source for the development of autism spectrum disorder.

So the burgeoning new neuroscience sketches a kind of neural engineering that, without resort to magic or telepathy, could help to explain how two human beings could be mind-melded together into a *this something* without ceasing to be two. And it suggests that there could be a naturalistic explanation for what the senior devil in Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* takes to violate the laws of logic: it enables there to be two human beings that are somehow truly one *this something* while remaining two substances.

## Synchronization in succession

But, of course, the current neuroscientific work on interbrain synchrony is just suggestive even with regard to the relatively simple case of an occurrent condition of union between two people. For the kind of case exemplified by Daniel's prayer, clearly something more complicated is needed. That is because an occurrent union is what some medieval logicians called 'a permanent state'; that is, a state that can exist entirely at one particular point in time. But the kind of union indicated by Daniel's use of the first-person plural pronoun is what medieval logicians called 'a successive state', a state that requires a period of time for its existence. This medieval distinction is helpful for thinking about what else is needed as the referent of the 'we' in Daniel's prayer.

Dan Zahavi puts the point this way:

that there are types of we that can survive a change of members should be obvious. Just consider the we that is referenced in a statement like the following, 'I am proud to be a member of this chess club. We have won the championship four times since 1910' or consider the case of the resistance fighter who, when facing the firing squad, yells 'We will defeat you'. That there are processes of group identification involved in both cases should be obvious, but the question is how these identificatory processes can get off the ground and target a group that either predates or survives its current members.[49]

In this connection, the new research on interbrain-synchrony may help. Consider an oral tradition, for example. It is now thought that the Homeric epics were not originally the product of a literate culture but were instead composed and transmitted orally. Someone who composed a part of a Homeric epic (or all of it) recited the poetry orally to some listeners; and one or more of those listeners memorized the recited poetry and (with or without adding new material) recited it to others, some of whom remembered it and recited it to still others, and so on. The oral tradition of the Homeric epics results from a process of composing, remembering, and transmitting the poetry from one person or community to another over a period of time.

But now we can ask about oral tradition itself. It does not fit into any of the Aristotelian categories, for example. So what is it? Given the experiment in which the process of two people jointly crafting a story was characterized by interbrain synchrony, we might say that the oral tradition of Homeric poetry is a *this something* that arises from the successive interbrain synchrony of multiple generations around Homeric poetry. That is, it seems that there is one something – an intergenerational community of those constructing and/or reciting and passing on Homeric poetry – which is constituted as one thing by the people reciting, remembering, and passing on Homeric poetry through a successive series of mind-meldings around the poetry.[50]

By extension, something analogous might help to explain the use of the first-person plural in Moses's claim that *we* have heard the voice of God. In the story, Moses himself has heard the voice of God. It is reasonable to suppose that the group of those who were listening to God with Moses on the mountain and the group of those who are listening to Moses later, on the banks of the Jordan River, are each mind-melded with Moses as they listen. So perhaps we could understand the *we* who have heard the voice of God as a something-or-other constituted first by Moses and those people who were originally with him at the time God was speaking and then in succession the subsequent generation of people who were not present when God spoke but are listening to Moses by the river right before entering the Holy Land. Like the oral tradition of Homeric poetry, the something-or-other that is the referent of Moses's plural first-person pronoun when he says that *we* have heard the voice of God could be constituted by means of the oral transmission of stories, through successive mind-melding from the original people who did hear God's voice to a subsequent generation which did not hear it through their ears.

Of course, even if this supposition were suitably clarified, we could still wonder whether such mind-melding would be sufficient to support Moses's claim that *we* have heard the voice of God. But here we might get some help from the neuroscience of mind-melding around the performance of music.

Recent research has shown that there is interbrain synchrony not only among musicians engaged together in a musical performance but even between musicians engaged in the performance of music and the audience who are simply listening to it. One set of researchers says,

'Playing music in a concert represents a multilevel interaction between musicians and the audience, where interbrain synchronization might play an essential role. ... Making music in a concert represents a social interaction in which the musicians communicate with each other and with their audience.'[51]

It seems then that the successive brain synchronization between at least some musicians in a musical performance and some of the members of the audience listening to them is included in the means by which those members of the audience hear the music. But, as these researchers are at pains to make clear, that brain synchronization continues even during pauses in the music, when the audience is not hearing the music by means of sounds conveyed to their ears. They say,

Previous research on neural synchrony in musical interaction has shown that intra- and interbrain synchronization is particularly enhanced during periods that put high demands on musical coordination ... In this context, it can be expected that such coupling may also occur between audience members' brains and the instruments. However, this should not substantiate the claim that synchronization between brains is simply a result of a common perceptual input and/or a common motor output ... As recently shown in a hyperscanning study of piano duets,[52] keeping sensory input and movements comparable across conditions as well as during musical pauses without sensory input or movement, interbrain synchrony does not merely depend on shared sensorimotor impact but can also emerge endogenously, from aligned cognitive processes supporting social interaction.[53]

As this research reports, the mind-melding which was established between the musicians and those members of the audience synchronized with them while they were performing can remain even when the members of the audience have no occurrent auditory input from the music made by the performers. In that case, those members of the audience are not hearing through their ears the music which the performers had made and which the members of the audience had heard. But some of those members of the audience can nonetheless remain in the synchronized condition they were in when the music being performed reached their ears; and to that extent they remain mind-melded with the performers.

If interbrain synchrony can support a claim of this sort about mind-melding with regard to music, is there some extension of such interbrain synchrony that might support the claim Moses makes about hearing the voice of God? Could the audience for Moses's claim be mind-melded with Moses through their experiences together, and could they by this means somehow count as hearing what Moses himself had heard, without having heard it through their own auditory channels?

In this connection consider what seems to be a fairly radical extension of the same idea. Gregory the Great says,

Cain did not know the time of Antichrist and yet became a member of Antichrist as that evil deed deserved. Judas was ignorant of the fierceness of Antichrist's tempting and yet succumbed to the might of his cruelty when tempted by greed ... And so it is that a wicked body is joined to its head; so it is that members are joined to members, when they do not know each other by acquaintance and yet are united to each other by their actions ... [B]oth times and places separated the church of Thyatira from personal knowledge of Jezebel, but because that 'church' was similarly charged with crimes of behavior, Jezebel is said to dwell therein and to persist in [doing] perverse deeds ... And so it happens that every wicked person who has already perished

survives in his perverse imitators, and the worker of wickedness who has not yet arrived is already visible in those who do his works.[54]

Gregory is here evidently imagining an entity that is an evil imitation of the church, which is the body of Christ. On the Pauline description of the body of Christ,[55] all Christians comprise one entity, the body of Christ; and they comprise this entity in virtue of the fact that each person within it is individually united to Christ, who is the head of the body. If we focus on Gregory's allusion to the Pauline notion of the body of Christ, then we could think of the entity Gregory is describing as the body of Antichrist. On this interpretation of his lines, Gregory the Great is supposing there is a successive chain of people connected to one leader whose evil attributes somehow bind all the individuals into one entity through their union to him.

Gregory's notion of an entity into which the wicked are conjoined through their evil acts that unwittingly unite them to Antichrist significantly stretches the notion of successive mind-melding. Nonetheless, given the importance of the Pauline notion of the body of Christ to Christian theology, it might be tempting at this point to try to produce a more carefully formulated metaphysical account of Gregory's notion, so that it could serve as an exemplar of a *this something* comprised of more than one human being. But even if such an account could be constructed, it would not be sufficient to explain and support the use of the first-person plural pronoun in Daniel's prayer.

That is because Daniel's prayer ascribes both communal guilt and communal shame to all those persons in the something-or-other referred to by his use of 'we'. The synchronization of minds yielded by a chain of successive remembering or successive shared musical experience or even successive unwittingly imitative evil acts is manifestly insufficient to warrant Daniel's use of 'we'. It might be that Gregory's notion of a union through successive mind-melded sinful actions can constitute a community that has sinned, but even so it would not explain how any kind of sinfulness could be attributed truly to Daniel, who risked death rather than disobey God's commands.

To consider what else might be needed to explain Daniel's prayer, it is helpful to consider Aquinas's notion of a stain on the soul.

## The stain on the soul, and a simulacrum of the stain

On Aquinas's view, serious moral wrongdoing leaves the wrongdoer with impairments in his intellect and will, but these impairments do not exhaust the defects caused by such wrongdoing. Aquinas calls the additional defects 'a stain on the soul'; and, for the sake of convenience, I will simply adopt his phrase. To understand what he has in mind with this phrase, it is helpful to recognize that there are cognitive and conative faculties besides intellect and will, and wrongdoing can leave them in a morally worse condition, too.

For example, there is memory. The very memory of having engaged in serious moral wrongdoing that caused suffering to others diminishes something that might have been lovely in the wrongdoer's psyche; and, by staying in memory, the past evil a person has done remains part of the wrongdoer's present.[56]

Then there are the empathic capacities. Most people cannot simulate the mind of a person who commits seriously evil acts, and we give expression to that incapacity by saying 'I can't imagine how a person could do something like that!' But the perpetrator himself does understand what it feels like to do such things and, what is worse, what it feels like to *want* to do them. There is consequently a kind of moral elasticity in the evildoer's psyche. The hard barrier against the doing of evil acts – the 'I can't!' – that ordinarily decent people have in their psyches is missing in the person who engages in such evil, and the consequent moral flabbiness in the wrongdoer's psyche has something repellent about it.[57]

In addition, on Aquinas's view, there is a relational component to the stain on the soul. Included in the stain is an absence of some good relational characteristic which a person would have had if he had not done a serious morally wrong act and which would have contributed to his inner loveliness.[58] An ongoing relationship is affected by the past states of the persons in it, not least because the past can live on through memory; it is not only their present condition that is relevant to the relationship among persons.

For these reasons, on Aquinas's view, in addition to its effects on a person's intellect and will, serious moral wrongdoing can diminish a person; or, as Aquinas says, it can leave a stain on the soul through its effects on the wrongdoer's psyche, including through the disruptions it makes in the wrongdoer's relationships with those affected directly or indirectly by his wrongdoing. These effects of serious moral wrongdoing lessen the inner comeliness that the wrongdoer might otherwise have had. Because they are not moral defects in the will, such psychological leftovers of moral wrongdoing are not by themselves worthy of blame or punishment; but there is something morally lamentable about them all the same.[59] Consequently, the stain on the soul itself may leave the wrongdoer in a morally worse condition than he was before he did the evil in question, not because he merits punishment or even blame for these psychic leftovers of evil, but because he is somehow more morally shabby than people who have not committed serious moral wrongdoing.[60]

Clearly, there are many questions that could be raised about Aquinas's notion of the stain on the soul, but I am leaving them to one side here because it is actually an extension of his idea that I want to focus on. For my purposes, it is helpful to see that there can be something like a simulacrum of the stain on the soul.

We can sketch this notion by noticing that mind-reading and empathy between two people can occur when one of them is engaged in doing an action that is evil or morally repulsive. That this is so helps explain why watching graphic videos of horrific violence or abuse is so distressing to most people. The dreadful scenes in those videos can prompt mind-reading and empathic sensations in the viewer too.[61] The neural systems engaged by mind-reading and empathy give the viewer some no doubt limited sense of what it feels like to do such things and to want to do them, even though they give this sense in a way which is disconnected from the viewer's own intellect and will. Sensing what it feels like to do and to want to do such things can be greatly troubling if the things in question are deeply revulsive to one's own moral sensibilities, to one's own beliefs and desires. What mind-reading and empathy give in such a case is not an actual stain on the soul but something like a simulacrum of the stain on the soul. The neural engineering underlying the social nature of human beings can connect human beings in a way that transfers something not identical to a stain on the soul but something somewhat analogous to it.

The empathic pain Paula has when she sees Jerome impale his bare foot on a nail is in some sense a pain of Jerome's that she is sharing; but that feeling of pain is not connected to the beliefs and desires Paula would have had if it had been her own foot that was hurt. Analogously, when (in person or through some medium such as narrative or film) a morally decent person Paula sees Jerome doing something seriously morally wrong and mind-reads him as he is doing it, then the resulting empathic state in Paula is not connected to the rest of her psyche in the way Jerome's intellect and will are connected to the rest of Jerome's psyche. Paula's will rejects doing the kind of acts Jerome is engaged in, for example, while Jerome actually wills to do them; and she is distressed by the feeling she gets from Jerome empathically, instead of accepting or welcoming it as Jerome does.

Consequently, Paula does not get a real stain on the soul from her empathic connection to Jerome in his wrongdoing. In having some of Jerome's mental states in herself through mindreading and empathy, she has some degree of mind-melding with Jerome. But she does not in consequence become morally shabby; her psyche does not become morally worse

than it might have been, any more than a person who dreams she is running is actually running. But her mind-reading of Jerome and empathic connection to him will be disturbing to Paula because she experiences at the same time both some of Jerome's evil mental states and her own distress at those mental states. This is one way in which someone who mind-reads another person as he is engaged in serious moral evil gains something like a simulacrum of the stain on the soul of the wrong-doer.[62]

To get some intuitive feeling both for the notion of the stain on the soul and the analogous notion of a simulacrum of the stain, it may help to have an example drawn from history. So consider in this connection Amon Göth.

Göth was the commandant of a concentration camp in Poland during the Nazi occupation, and by all accounts he was one of the most sadistic of the Nazi camp commanders. In his film *Schindler's List*, Spielberg depicted him as a moral monster. At the end of the war, at the age of 37, Göth was convicted of torturing and killing an unidentifiably large number of people; and he was hanged for his crimes in September 1946.

Now suppose that Göth had not been executed but that, like Albert Speer, he had simply been sentenced to a lengthy period of imprisonment; suppose also that, like Speer, Göth had presented himself convincingly as totally repentant. Then when Göth was released from prison, it seems that his intellect and will would have been those of a morally decent person; and (in my thought experiment) he would not then merit any further punishment or blame either since he had finished his justly imposed prison sentence. But, even so, many ordinary people would have been unwilling to invite him to dinner. Even with the completion of his punishment and with thorough repentance, there does seem to remain something about Göth that alienates others.

Something in some parts of Göth's psyche other than his will and intellect have to be the source of this alienating since Göth's total repentance (in this thought experiment) puts his intellect and will into the same condition as that of ordinary, morally decent people. And so the problem has to lie in the conditions still obtaining in other parts of Göth's psyche. The deficiencies or impairments in those parts of his psyche will not themselves be worthy of blame or punishment; but it seems clear that they nonetheless leave Göth morally worse than he was before his wrongdoing. The alienation of others from him, manifested in the unwillingness to invite him to dinner even if he were in a repentant state at the end of a completed lengthy prison term, is a kind of moral judgement on Göth. In my view, this hypothesized fictional case of Göth illustrates Aquinas's notion of a stain on the soul.

We can understand the notion of a simulacrum of a stain on the soul by analogy. The connection Paula has to Jerome that she gains through mind-reading him in his evildoing can be distressing to Paula, and so it can diminish some things in Paula's psyche that would otherwise have been healthier or more functional. Unlike an actual stain on the soul, the diminishments in Paula's psyche will not be morally lamentable. But they will nonetheless have a negative impact on her flourishing, not because the stain alienates her from the human community, as in Göth's case, but because the simulacrum leaves her somehow alienated from herself.

As it happens, Göth's story also provides examples of a simulacrum of a stain. While he was camp commander, Göth had a relationship with a woman Ruth Irene Kalder, who seems to have been in love with him and who apparently tried to blind herself to his evil. In the course of that relationship, Ruth Irene had a daughter Monika Hertwig. Monika never knew her father – she was less than a year old when he was executed – and she grew up knowing next to nothing about him either. By the time she was an adult, Monika was still largely ignorant of the truth about Göth.

In connection with the making of *Schindler's List*, Ruth Irene was interviewed by the filmmakers about Göth; and in the course of that interview they brought home to her the truth

about the horrors Göth had perpetrated. The film makers also allowed Monika to listen in secretly to that interview.

The interview forced Ruth Irene finally to confront the true nature of the man she had loved and been intimate with, and that truth was apparently unbearable for her. The day after the interview, she committed suicide. But what Monika learned through the interview was also devastating for her. As she makes clear in her memoir, *I Have to Love My Father, Don't I?*,[63] she spent years of her life afterwards struggling to come to terms with the evil her father had done.[64]

Then there is Göth's granddaughter. In consequence of a brief relationship with a Nigerian man, Monika had a daughter Jennifer Teege. Monika felt unable to care for the baby; shortly after the baby's birth, Monika gave her into the foster care of a family that eventually adopted her. In that family, Jennifer grew up unaware of her grandfather and his crimes. She discovered the truth through an incredible coincidence. Wandering through a city library, she picked a book off the library shelves at random and glanced through it. It turned out to be her mother's memoir. The book sent her into a serious life crisis from which she recovered only slowly. In her own book *My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me*,[65] she details the ruinous impact that the knowledge of her grandfather had on her and the long struggle she had to come to terms with her family history.[66]

As this severely abbreviated summary shows, the evil Göth did, which left a real stain on the soul in him, also left its mark on his lover Ruth Irene, and then on his daughter Monika, who never knew her father, and subsequently also on his granddaughter Jennifer, who was an adult before she realized who her grandfather was. Ruth Irene, Monika, and Jennifer are of course bound together by their family connection to Göth: Ruth Irene as the mother of his child, and Monika and Jennifer as his biological descendants. But clearly more than the family relation is needed to explain the effects of his evil on these women; they had the family connection for years before they felt its ill effects.

For each woman, the traumatic effects began with her hearing true stories about Göth's actions. It is as if the combination of the family connection and the stories produced a mind-melding of some sort, psychological if not neurological, with Göth; but it was a highly distressing mind-melding for all three women.[67] The result was not a stain on the soul, but something like a simulacrum of the stain on the soul, successively passed on from one generation to the next through connection to Göth and true stories about his evil acts. That simulacrum does not make any of the women morally lamentable, as an actual stain on the soul would do; but it does leave each of them considerably disturbed and somehow divided within herself. It is as if the evil Göth did, which appalls each of the women, is nonetheless somehow also inside each of them, with the result that each of them is alienated from herself. Each of them felt her connection to Göth as both a trauma and a kind of defilement. Ruth Irene dealt with it by being the agent of her own destruction; the autobiographies of Monika and Jennifer chronical their more complicated struggle with it.[68]

## The simulacrum of a stain, communal guilt and shame, and suffering

Recent research in epigenetics has shown that it is possible for the biological correlates of psychological trauma to be passed on through generations in a successive genetic chain from the person who originally suffered the trauma to others who did not.[69] Analogously, it seems possible that a simulacrum of a stain can be passed successively from one person to another in a connected series of minds synchronized around a wrongdoer's evil actions or even around true stories about those actions. The three women connected to Göth are bound together not only because they share a family relation but also because they share Göth's stories and the simulacrum of a stain that the stories and their family relation to Göth give them. If we can make sense of this idea, then it seems that the unity enabled

by mind-melding and a shared simulacrum of a stain on the soul could give some help in understanding the communal guilt and shame expressed in Daniel's prayer.

Think of the matter this way. When Americans who are living now suppose that *we* owe reparations for the long-past evil of the enslavement of kidnapped Africans, who or what is it that has the obligation to make these reparations?[70] And what sense is there in our thinking that the community of the currently living innocent have an obligation to do what is in effect penance for the morally wrong acts of the long-dead guilty?[71] Additionally, what sense is there in *our* feeling shame over the actions of the past slave-holders, as many Americans now do (and in my view ought to do)? How is that sense of shame to be explained?

Here the example given by the story of Amon Göth is suggestive. It might be possible to explain both the obligation of reparations for past slavery and the sense of shame over it if there were a something-or-other which by means of shared true stories about the past practice of slavery in America binds those who are part of the current American community together into a *this something* with the past slaveholders. Could there be a shared simulacrum of a stain on the soul that weaves the guilty dead and the living innocent into a kind of metaphysical unity so that those now living can truthfully say that *we* owe reparations for past enslavement of Africans, that *we* are ashamed of *our* past practice of slavery?[72]

Unfortunately, whether or not these sketchy suggestions could be turned into a satisfactory metaphysical account explaining communal guilt and shame, it would still not be enough to deal with the puzzle of Daniel's prayer. That is because the people who are part of the something-or-other which Daniel is referring to with his first-person plural expressions of guilt and shame are people who are suffering; and it is part of the point of Daniel's confession to accept their suffering as coming from a just and merciful God. Whatever help the notion of a simulacrum of a stain can give to explain communal guilt or communal shame, communal punishment seems to pose a more challenging problem.[73]

But here too the notion of a simulacrum of a stain on the soul may help. The women bound together by their connection to Göth and stories about him certainly suffered because of their connection to him. But it would be an unreflective mistake to take their suffering as a punishment.

On the contrary, their suffering seems to have been purgative, at least for Monika and Jennifer. Jennifer's memoir made a powerful impact on many people, as witness the fact that it became a New York Times bestseller and was translated into Danish, English, French, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. And in her recorded videos after the success of her memoir, she is evidently flourishing, as she was not when she first came to know the stories of her grandfather. Monika's suffering and her struggle to do something to make amends for her father's evil were chronicled in the prize-winning film *Inheritance*, produced by James Moll, the Executive Director of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. It is clear in the video that her attempts to come to terms with the harm her father did were transformative for her. She is no longer the pathetic woman she seems to be in her earlier adult years; rather, there is something admirable and appealing about her in her attempts to do something as amends. And maybe some analogue of this point can apply even to Ruth Irene. She could not bear living with the truth about the man she had loved; the knowledge of his evil was intolerable to her. Certainly her suicide is sorrowful. But while she still found Göth and her relationship with him somehow acceptable to her, she was not sorrowful; she was horrible.

If we think about the suffering occasioned by the simulacrum of a stain on the soul not as punishment for individual personal guilt – of which there is none – but as healing for what the simulacrum has left greatly disturbed in the psyche of the person who has it, then perhaps the suffering of the innocent members of Daniel's community, including Daniel himself, can be understood in some similar ways.

## Theological reflections

Whether these considerations, prompted in part by the new neurobiological research, could be developed enough to explain Daniel's prayer or Moses's speech is not clear. But it is clear that the very attempt to find a metaphysical something-or-other which is the referent of Daniel's first-person plural pronoun will strike many people as counter-intuitive – perhaps because they have an unnoticed acceptance of a sort of Aristotelian metaphysics, or perhaps because they share an unexamined commitment to reductionism that makes the metaphysics of human union alien. Whatever the reason, it seems that, in effect, many people share the attitude of Lewis's senior Tempter, who thinks that even the idea of union in love between two human persons is logically incoherent if taken in any literal sense.

But it is worth noticing what difference Christian theology makes to these metaphysical issues. Here I want to gesture to just two Christian doctrines: the doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the Trinity; and I will take Aquinas's interpretations of these doctrines as representative, both because his views are the ones I know best and also because they are philosophically and theologically sophisticated.

We can begin with Aquinas's explanation of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Aquinas supposes that in the first instant in which a person comes to faith, the Holy Spirit begins to indwell in that person, and it remains in him for as long as he does not return to rejecting faith. So, for example, Aquinas says,

> There is one general way by which God is in all things by essence, power, and presence, [namely,] as a cause in the effects participating in his goodness. But in addition to this way there is a special way [in which God is in a thing by essence, power, and presence] which is appropriate for a rational creature, in whom God is said to be as the thing known is in the knower and the beloved is in the lover ... In this special way, God is not only said to be in a rational creature but even to dwell in that creature.[74]

On this view, in faith, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, a human person has a second-personal connection with God. In describing the love that is necessary for a person to have the Holy Spirit, Aquinas says,

> Since the love by which we love God is in us by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit himself must also be in us ... Therefore, since we are made lovers of God by the Holy Spirit, and every beloved is in the lover ... necessarily the Father and the Son dwell in us also, by the Holy Spirit.[75]

In fact, as Aquinas interprets the relevant theological claims, the indwelling Holy Spirit unites a human being with God in a relationship personal enough to count as friendship with God. Aquinas says,

> In the first place, it is proper to friendship to converse with one's friend ... It is also a property of friendship that one take delight in a friend's presence, that one rejoice in his words and deeds ... and it is especially in our sorrows that we hasten to our friends for consolation. Since then the Holy Spirit constitutes us God's friends and makes God dwell in us and us dwell in God, it follows that through the Holy Spirit we have joy in God.[76]

Aquinas assumes that a second-personal connection of love between two human persons enables them to grow in connaturality with each other. That is, on his view, if Paula and Jerome love each other and are united to each other, then Paula and Jerome will tend to

become more like each other in certain psychological and moral respects.[77] Among other things, their judgements and intuitions about things will grow increasingly similar. For Aquinas, a second-personal connection between Paula and God will have the same sort of effect. When Paula has a second-personal connection with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit, then Paula will grow in connaturality with God. Connected to God in this way, Paula's intuitions and judgements will grow to be more like those of God.

Because of this connection, it will be possible for Paula to have as-it-were mind-reading with God, in a direct and intuitive way that is in some respects like the mind-reading between human persons.[78] On Aquinas's view, when she is in this condition, Paula will not need to try to reason things out as regards ethics, for example. She will be disposed to think and act in morally appropriate ways because of her connection to God, and not because of her reliance on reason.

So, for example, in explaining wisdom as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (rather than as an infused or an acquired virtue),[79] Aquinas says:

> wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the eternal law. Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. ... Now sympathy or connaturality for divine things is the result of love, which unites us to God ... Consequently, wisdom which is a gift has its cause in the will, and this cause is love.[80]

In fact, on Aquinas's view, all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are a manifestation of a second-personal connection of love with God; and they have their source in God's indwelling in a human person. That indwelling and the union it establishes result in a person's being attentive to God and apt to follow the voice of God heard inwardly. So, for example, speaking of the gifts, Aquinas says:

> 'the gifts are perfections of a human being, whereby he is disposed to be amenable to the promptings of God'.[81]

And Aquinas generalizes this account of human perfection by maintaining that the perfection of every creature is a matter of a relationship to the Creator; in human beings, the bond of the relationship is love.[82] Aquinas says:

> the perfection of each thing is nothing other than a participation in a likeness to God; for we are good to the extent to which we are assimilated to God. And so our unity is perfective to the extent to which it participates in the divine unity. Now there is a twofold unity in the divine [persons]: a unity of nature ... and a unity of love in the Father and the Son, which is the unity of the Spirit. And both are in us, not in the same way, but by a kind of likeness.[83]

Clearly, it makes a difference here that on Christian doctrine God is triune: one God in three persons.[84] On that doctrine, there is only one God, who is being or *esse*; but it is also true that there are three divine persons. The three divine persons are not reducible to the one Deity, as if the *esse* that God is were more foundational than the three persons; and, similarly, the *esse* of the deity is not reducible to the divine persons, as if they were more fundamental than the *esse* that God is.[85] Consequently, on the doctrine of the Trinity, it is right and appropriate for the one God to use the first-person plural pronoun to self-refer.[86]

An example of such self-referral can be found in the Gospel of John. In that text, Christ uses the first-person plural to refer to the unity that God is; and he connects the unity of all the faithful to that unity of divine persons in the deity. Speaking in his divine rather than his human nature, Christ the Son prays to God the Father for all those people who are or who will be connected to Christ through faith. He prays that

> they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us … And the glory which you gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one. (John 17:21-23)

Aquinas comments on this passage:

> [Christ] says: I am praying *that they all may be one*. As the Platonists say, a thing acquires its unity from that from which it acquires its goodness. For that is good for a thing which preserves it; and a thing is preserved only if it remains one. Thus when our Lord prays that his disciples be perfect in goodness, he prays that they be one. He gives an example of this unity and its cause, saying, *as you, Father, in me, and I in you.*[87]

And Aquinas cites approvingly Chrysostom's interpretation of this passage, which takes Christ to be praying for God's gifts to his faithful.

In this connection, both Chrysostom and Aquinas are echoing the Pauline line about the body of Christ. In 1 Cor.12, Paul says:

> **4** Now there are different gifts but the same Spirit. **… 12** For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and the members being many are nonetheless all one body, so Christ is also. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are slaves or free; and we have been all made to drink one Spirit. **14** For the body is not one member but many. **… 20** And now although there are many members, yet they are just one body.[88]

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Aquinas maintains that the purpose of the divine gifts is in fact participation in union with God. He cites the phrase in Christ's prayer for his disciples, '*that they may be one, as we also are one*'; and he says about that phrase:

> the purpose of God's gifts is to unite us in a unity which is like the unity of the Father and the Son. The manner of this unity is added when he says, *I in them and you in me.* They arrive at unity, because they see that I am in them, as in a temple … by grace, which is a certain likeness of the Father's essence, by which you, Father, are in me by a unity of nature: *I am in the Father and the Father in me* (John 14:10). And this is in order *that they may be made perfect.*[89]

Aquinas understands the nature of the unity in question this way. He says:

> 'The Father and the Son are one by a love which is not a participated love and a gift from another; rather, this love proceeds from them, for the Father and Son love themselves by the Holy Spirit. We are one by participating in a higher love.'[90]

On Aquinas's view, then, a human person most fulfils his human nature when he is integrated into a unity whose components are not only other human persons but even the

persons of the Trinity. But what kind of unity is this? When someone in this unity uses the first-person plural, what is he referring to? Whatever it is, it is a *this something* that has persons as its constituents.

Maybe the Pauline notion of the church as the body of Christ captures this idea. Maybe this is what Dante had in mind with his idea of the mystic Rose of heaven. But whatever the right philosophical and theological characterization of the something-or-other enfolding the persons of the Trinity and human persons into a unity of love may be, it seems that there is nothing in Aristotelian metaphysics that can capture or explain it. And yet, as these brief remarks show, the Christian tradition depends on it and incorporates it. And maybe we can say the same thing about the Jewish tradition if it turns out that some such unity could explain the prayer of Daniel and the speech of Moses to the Israelites who are about to cross the Jordan River.

## Conclusion

So this is what I want to say in conclusion.

It is clear that human beings are a highly social species; and there are neural systems, including whatever systems underlie interbrain synchrony, that have a role in enabling human beings to function as the social animals they are. Mind-reading, empathy, and the mind-melding provided in part by interbrain synchrony connect people into smaller or larger social groups; and at least some of these groups have a unity that lets the united human beings function as one. A union of this sort can exist and function successively and diachronically as well as synchronically.

That this is so has implications for an array of philosophical and theological issues, including the notion of a people, the concomitant notions of a people's communal guilt and communal shame, the notion of the church as the body of Christ, the understanding of human perfection as a likeness to a triune God, and many other such issues. What is required to elucidate these issues is a metaphysics that can explain the nature of a *hoc aliquid* – a *this something*, a concrete particular – that includes human persons as constituents.

It is clear that an Aristotelian metaphysics cannot accommodate such entities. On the Aristotelian metaphysics that Aquinas also accepts (when he is thinking metaphysically as distinct from theologically), no substance can have substances as parts. But it seems that on at least some Jewish and Christian views, including the views Aquinas himself assumes when he is not self-consciously doing metaphysics, that is precisely the kind of entity that, for example, the Jewish people or the body of Christ seems to be.

What *we* are is not easy to explain, then, and this result should not be a surprise. Aquinas supposes that every creaturely entity exists by virtue of participating in the *esse*, the *being*, that God is. On the doctrine of the Trinity, however, the one, utterly simple God is nonetheless three persons, who are distinct enough that they can love each other. For created beings to participate in the *esse* that God is therefore requires that the creaturely analogue to the deity be a *this something* that has persons as constituents.

And so this article has been an example of apophatic philosophy: I have tried to sketch the nature of what *we* are by showing that the metaphysical and neurobiological resources currently available to us are not sufficient to elucidate the quiddity of the *this something*, the something-or-other, that we are. But it is my hope that, like apophatic explanations generally, this exercise in coming to know what we do not know elucidates the prayer of Daniel and the speech of Moses at the river Jordan and thereby also illuminates something of what we are.

portion of this article was given as the Maritain lecture at Notre Dame in 2025; and I am grateful to the Director of the Maritain Center, Therese Cory, and the Notre Dame audience for the lecture for their helpful comments also.

## Notes

**1.**  Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the Hebrew Bible are from the *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*, Jewish Publication Society (1985), although I have felt free to modify that translation mildly when I thought I could do better. I am also grateful to Menashe Chaim Roberts for help with the translations from the Hebrew.

**2.**  John Greco called to my attention the need to note in this connection that there are different kinds of groups and group statements and that evaluation of Daniel's prayer could depend on the kind of group statement it is construed to be.

**3.**  There is a large literature on the subject of collective or corporate responsibility and moral obligation, and it elucidates some of the complexities at issue in treating a group or collection of people as worthy of blame or punishment. See, for example, Collins (2023); Jansen (2014, 91-102); Leffler (2023, 640–659); Miller (2007, 389–409).

**4.**  I am grateful to Naomi Eilan and John Greco for prompting me to search for the right way to explain the puzzle I want to use as exemplary for my purposes in this article.

**5.**  For an excellent discussion of this topic which also examines extensively the secondary literature on the topic and myriad philosophical details necessarily omitted in this paper, see Zahavi (2025). I am grateful to Dan Zahavi for allowing me to see this book in advance of publication.

**6.**  See Goldwurm (2010).

**7.**  See Schmidt (2022), 161.

**8.**  See Jerome (1977), 91.

**9.**  Someone might suppose that as a leader of his people Daniel bears some responsibility for their sins; but this supposition has to be rejected because the sins that Daniel is confessing are the ones that led to the captivity of the Jewish people, as Daniel's prayer makes clear; and Daniel was still very young at the time his people were taken into captivity. He could not be thought to be a leader of the people at the time of the sins being punished by captivity. I am grateful to Sam Lebens for calling my attention to the need to address this point.

**10.**  Saadia Gaon (2006, 589). The translator notes that Saadia adds the phrase 'my transgressions' to the original line that begins Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:4. And it may be that Saadia was attempting to solve the apparent puzzle raised by Daniel's use of the first-person plural pronoun in his confession by trying to make explicit that even the impressively obedient Daniel had personal sin of some sort. I am grateful to Menashe Chaim Roberts for calling this point to my attention.

**11.**  See the detailed discussion of such issues in Lackey (2021).

**12.**  Someone might object that human beings are sometimes thought to be just in imposing suffering on a whole group even when the imposition of suffering results in collateral injury to the innocent. But it is clear that an omnipotent God could impose or allow suffering on the guilty while protecting the innocent. So in the case of Daniel's prayer, the guilt and shame being confessed has to be taken to apply, in some way, to all those in the group who are suffering. I discuss this issue in more detail below.

**13.**  There are analogous puzzling cases employing the second-person plural. For example, in Deuteronomy, Moses says to the people who are about to enter the Holy Land that when he came down from the mountain with the law on two tables of stone, 'you had sinned against the Lord your God and had made yourselves a molten calf' (Deut.9:16). But the people who made that molten calf are dead by this point in the story, and the people Moses is addressing were young children then or not yet born. I am grateful to Sam Lebens for calling my attention to the importance of these examples.

**14.**  With this odd phrase, I am trying to reproduce in English what in my view Aquinas means with the phrase '*hoc aliquid*". *Aliquid* is in fact one of the transcendentals. The most discussed transcendentals are *being, goodness, truth*, and *oneness* (or *unity*); but, for Aquinas, there are actually two more: *res* (thing) and *aliquid* (something). These latter two each indicate something concrete and particular. For detailed discussion of the transcendentals in the thought of Aquinas, see Aertsen (1996). For discussion of the way in which something apparently abstract and universal, such as a form, can be a concrete particular, especially with regard to human beings, see Shields (2023, 330-350.) On the lore of the transcendentals, where there is oneness or unity, there is being; and where there is being, there is a *this something.* Consequently, on Thomist metaphysics, the oneness or unity I am concerned with in this paper must be taken as a *this something.*

**15.**  The puzzle I am focusing on in this article can be thought of as a species of the much larger puzzle about what unifies anything at all into one something. The larger puzzle received considerable discussion in early twentieth-century analytic philosophy. For an excellent discussion of that history, see Lebens (2008). I am grateful to Sam Lebens for calling this paper to my attention in this connection. Aristotelians (and Thomists) suppose that the larger puzzle can be solved with the metaphysics of hylomorphism for any unity that does not have substances

as parts. But, as I go on to explain, Aristotelian hylomorphic metaphysics is insufficient to explain the unities at issue in this article.

**16.** Someone might object that on Aristotelian hylomorphism, it is possible for there to be things within a substance that would be substances in their own right outside the entity they compose. This claim is correct but does not contradict the point that on Aristotelian hylomorphism no substance is composed of substances. The water molecule is composed of one oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms; but, on Aristotelian hylomorphism, within the water molecule those atoms lose the form they had outside the water molecule and are instead configured by the one form of the water molecule. For detailed discussion of this issue, see Rooney (2022). I am grateful to Patrick Zoll for calling my attention to the need to make this point explicit.

**17.** See Van Inwagen (1990, ch.2–7).

**18.** Annette Baier comments on this sort of background supposition in contemporary analytic approaches to social ontology: 'Has Descartes so brainwashed us that we cannot conceive of not taking the first person singular to be the place to start?' Baier (1997, 18). I am grateful to Dan Zahavi for calling this passage to my attention.

**19.** See Dupre (2025 40; 43–44). I am grateful to John Dupre for letting me see this work in advance of publication.

**20.** See, for example, *De unione verbi incarnati* 1.

**21.** There are other modes of union for things which are artifacts or heaps, but these are not relevant to the case of Christ.

**22.** Cf. *De unione verbi incarnati* 2.

**23.** *Summa contra Gentiles* (SCG) IV.41. (For translations of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* [ST], I like and generally use the translation of the Dominican Fathers of the English Province, which is readily available on the internet. For other translations of Aquinas's texts, I like and generally use the translations of the Lander, Wyoming Aquinas Institute. But in every case I have felt free to modify these translations when I thought I could do better.)

**24.** The whole poem can be found here: 'www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44099/the-ecstasy'.

**25.** Autism can stem from varying sources, ranging from genetics to institutional practices in orphanages. For an excellent recent discussion of the issue, see Reddy (2018, 433–452).

**26.** See Hobson (2004, 183) See also Hobson and Hobson (2008, 67–88).

**27.** See Hobson (2004, 183).

**28.** See Lewis (1970, 81–82).

**29.** Zahavi (2025) presents a helpful summary of phenomenological discussions and is also a good example of this approach. For an attempt at a careful formulation of the question and possible metaphysical answers to it in connection with the doctrine of original sin, see Rea (2007, 319–356)

**30.** As John Dupre argues in Dupre (2025).

**31.** There is a large literature on an analogous question having to do with the epistemology of groups considered as epistemological agents. See, for example, Lackey (2021) and the recent discussions of that book: Goldberg (2024, 811–823) and Nagel (2024, 825–833).

**32.** For a helpful recent discussion of mirror neurons and the social cognition they enable, at least in part, see Gallese and Sinigaglia (2018, 417–432). It is important to note that the neuroscience presented here is not necessary to my points, which could be made without them. If all the neuroscience apparently demonstrating the existence and function of a mirror neuron system for mind-reading and empathy were to be disproved, the points I am trying to make through discussion of the mirror neuron system would not be disproved in consequence. The neurobiology is only propaedeutic to my purposes, and the same point applies to the newer research on synchronized brains discussed below. There is a heuristic value in being aware of this current neuroscience, whether it stands the test of time or not, because it shows at least one way in which the brain could be engineered to subserve the mental states in question. It shows that there need not be anything magical or otherwise non-naturalistic about mind-reading and empathy or the phenomenon that in this article I am calling 'mind-melding'.

**33.** I have discussed mind-reading and related phenomena such as shared attention and joint agency extensively in various other publications; see, for example, Stump (2010, ch.4).

**34.** The word 'empathy' is employed with a variety of different meanings by different philosophers and neuroscientists. Dan Zahavi has defined it as 'a distinctive form of other-directed intentionality, distinct from both self-awareness and ordinary object-intentionality, which allows foreign experiences to disclose themselves as foreign rather than as one's own', Zahavi (2014, 138). This definition seems to me to encompass the basic idea underlying the sometimes complex definitions of empathy given by others. In commenting elsewhere on this definition, Zahavi remarks that 'empathy provides a special kind of knowledge by *acquaintance*' Zahavi and Michael (2018, 597). This is an understanding of empathy that I have argued for elsewhere; see, for example, Stump (2010, chs. 3 and 4).

**35.** There is a considerable literature on empathy. For a good introduction to some of the issues involved, see Goldman (2011, 31–44). Goldman argues that there are at least two different levels of empathy. One is more nearly involuntary and also more coarse-grained. The other is more under voluntary control, more fine-grained, and more dependent on past experience and training. The first is in play when a person winces as he sees someone

else get hurt. The second is engaged when someone is deeply involved in reading a novel. It seems clear that there is no sharp demarcation between these kinds, but rather a kind of continuum. In addition, one can also distinguish between affective empathy and cognitive empathy, where the latter is more tied to imagination and is more under voluntary control. For an excellent recent discussion of this and other issues raised by the notion of empathy, see Zahavi and Michael (2018, 589–606). Finally, in various other publications I have discussed some of these issues with regard to empathy, including the role of empathy in the transmission of knowledge through testimony; see, for example, Stump (2014, 204–30).

**36.** In this example, I focus on mind-reading that includes information garnered from the visual system, but other sensory systems can also be used for the same purpose. In fact, it is possible to mind-read through cues that do not employ sensory perception, at least not in their ordinary modes. One can mind-read another person during a texting conversation, for example. For further discussion of the details of such issues, see Stump (2010, ch.4 and 6).

**37.** The expression 'off-line' is frequently used with regard to computers; for example, a computer that is said to be off-line is one that is disconnected from the internet. In discussion of neurobiological systems, the expression 'off-line' is sometimes used to mean that some part of the neural system in question is disconnected from the larger neural system within which it would ordinarily be working.

**38.** And, of course, on this basis she also knows *that* Jerome is in pain. Empathic feeling of his pain is a reliable ground for knowledge that he is in pain.

**39.** Gallese (2005), 111.

**40.** Moran (2018), 5. I have learned from Moran's excellent work on intersubjectivity in this book, and I am grateful to Dan Zahavi for calling my attention to this passage in this connection.

**41.** That the phenomenon of mind-reading alone is insufficient to explain some common intersubjective experiences can be shown by an ingenious thought experiment devised by Naomi Eilan. Her current and more complicated version of this thought experiment can be found here: Eilan (2020). But what is especially helpful for my purposes is the simpler version that Eilan originally presented in a seminar. In that version, the thought experiment goes this way. Imagine that a university has required its faculty to attend a Saturday morning training run by a business lecturer brought in for the purpose, and imagine that two faculty colleagues Paula and Jerome are among those required to attend. At some point in the training, when Paula's frustrations with what she takes to be a colossal waste of her precious time on administrative idiocy are beginning to boil over, she catches the eye of her colleague and through mind-reading understands what he himself is feeling about the training. Imagine also that Jerome mindreads Paula at the same time so that he knows what Paula is feeling too. Then, as Eilan presented her thought experiment, this imagined story can continue in two different ways. It could be that through her mindreading of Jerome, Paula understands that Jerome loves the ideas being presented to him in the training; and Paula is then seriously disgusted with Jerome and in consequence is at least temporarily alienated from him. Alternatively, it could be that Paula and Jerome each simultaneously recognize that the other hates the stupid ideas being presented in the training, so that (as we say) a spark flows between them, in a way that at least temporarily unites them. Since the mind-reading is held the same in both versions of the imagined story, mind-reading alone cannot explain the differing relations between Paula and Jerome in the alternate endings of the story. In the first ending of the imagined story, there is no uniting between Paula and Jerome; but there is some, at least briefly, in the second ending. It seems that interbrain synchrony, present only in the second ending of the story, might be responsible for the difference in their intersubjective connection. I am grateful to Eilan for calling my attention to her *Inquiry* paper and for helpful discussion of this thought experiment.

**42.** There is some evidence that narratives have a special role to play in intersubjectivity and the development of adult abilities for social cognition. See, for example, Gallagher and Hutto (2008, 17–38).

**43.** For a good description of this experiment, see Denworth (2023, 50–57).

**44.** Denworth (2023, 53).

**45.** See Lindenberger et al. (2009). They say, 'Our findings show that interpersonally coordinated actions are preceded and accompanied by between-brain oscillatory couplings. Presumably, these couplings reflect similarities in the temporal properties of the individuals' percepts and actions. Whether between-brain oscillatory couplings play a causal role in initiating and maintaining interpersonal action coordination needs to be clarified by further research.' See also Müller et al. (2013, e73852). They say, 'In daily life, people must often coordinate their actions with those of others. Recent research indicates that synchronized brain activity accompanies coordinated behavior ... Oscillatory couplings also have been observed for other biological functions, such as respiration and cardiac activity during choir singing ... However, the neural mechanisms that implement interpersonally coordinated behavior remain elusive.'

**46.** Zahavi gives a helpful discussion of this same point and reviews some of the literature on it, especially in the work of Hannah Arendt. See Zahavi (2025, 60–70).

**47.** Zahavi puts the distinction at issue here this way:

> 'One of the specific challenges facing social psychology has been to avoid the Scylla
> of a supra-individual group consciousness and the Charybdis of an individualist reductionism
> that considers the group nothing but an aggregation of its individual parts' (Zahavi 2025, 64).

**48.** For the same reason, the union in mind-melding can be distinguished from the kind of union of consciousness which pan-psychists are trying to explain. That union results from the combination of the mentality inherent in all fundamental bits of matter, as panpsychists see it; and it results in the lower level material bits within a human being yielding just one human consciousness. The mind-melding enabled at least in part by interbrain synchrony is, by contrast, a unity that leaves intact the distinct individual human consciousnesses in it. For some discussion of the problem for panpsychists, see, for example, Coleman (2013, 19–44). I am grateful to Godehard Bruentrup for the reference.

**49.** Zahavi (2025, 157). For an earlier attempt to deal with some of these same issues, see, for example, Pettit (2014, 97–121) and Thomasson (2019, 4829–4845). In addition, Sam Lebens has pointed out to me that communities themselves can divide and then later merge. The history of Lithuania gives an example illustrating his point. In the fourteenth century, it was the largest country in Europe; by the sixteenth century, it was part of greater Poland; by the end of the eighteenth century, it had been subsumed into Russia; and at the start of the twenty-first century, it was again an independent country.

**50.** This claim about the intergenerational community producing an oral tradition does not give necessary and sufficient conditions for the identity of that community. Giving such conditions would require knowing what *we* are when we are united into this one communal something-or-other; and, as I explained at the outset, in this article I am not able to solve the puzzle about what we are.

**51.** See Müller and Lindenberger (2023), 74–90.

**52.** An excellent example of the point at issue here can be seen at the beginning of the piano duet in this video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIItKRaP2vc&t=29s. The music requires that both pianists' hands begin the music at exactly the same moment; but neither pianist can see the hands of the other when they are seated at their respective keyboards. The fact that without a sufficient external cue each pianist knows the very moment that the music should begin could be explained by the unscientific notion of telepathy if there were any such thing; but interbrain synchrony could explain it too and in a more scientifically acceptable manner.

**53.** See Müller and Lindenberger (2023), 74–90.

**54.** See Cassiodorus (2022), 52.

**55.** In 1 Cor. 12:12-27, among other places.

**56.** For a helpful discussion of the relationship of memory to the identity of a person, see (Eilan, forthcoming).

**57.** One might think of Harry Frankfurt's notion of volitional necessities in this connection. A person who has done a serious evil has lost some of the moral volitional necessities that characterize most ordinary other human beings. See Frankfurt (1999). For a detailed discussion of volitional necessities, see Stump (2022, ch. 4).

**58.** For a detailed discussion of Aquinas's notion of the stain on the soul, see Stump (2018, ch. 5).

**59.** Not everything that is morally deplorable is also culpable. That is at least in part because it is possible for a person to be in a morally bad condition without being responsible for being in that condition and therefore also without being worthy of blame for it. A man in an isolated area of Mongolia in the time of the Great Khan might have been completely persuaded that wife-beating in certain circumstances was obligatory for him. When he beat his wife in those circumstances, his psychic state would have been morally deplorable. But most people would hesitate to consider him worthy of blame or punishment for that act, because we would suppose that he is not responsible for his morally bad psychic condition; and we would think that the morally bad psychic condition is not itself an act for which punishment would be appropriate.

**60.** It is worth noting in this connection that, on Aquinas's optimistic view, it is possible for penitence after serious wrongdoing to leave a person in a more admirable moral state than he would have been if he had not engaged in the moral wrongdoing in the first place. For example, Aquinas says that 'this dignity [of innocence] the penitent cannot recover. Nevertheless, [the wrongdoer] recovers something greater sometimes' (ST III q.89 a.3).

See also ST I q.20 a.4 ad 4, where Aquinas presents two different ways of affirming the claim that a penitent person has more grace and more love of God than an innocent person does, and ST III q.89 a.2, where Aquinas argues that satisfaction made by a repentant wrongdoer can leave the wrongdoer with 'a greater grace than that which he had before'.

**61.** In line with much contemporary discussion of empathy, I am understanding empathy as distinct from sympathy. In watching a film depicting one person's violent and abusive treatment of another, a person may have unwelcome empathy with the abuser; but she is unlikely to feel sympathy for him. Sympathy is likely to be reserved for his victim. I am grateful to Dan Zahavi for calling my attention to the need to make this point explicit.

**62.** For more discussion of the notion of a simulacrum of the stain on the soul, see Stump (2018, ch. 5). There I argue that the cry of dereliction from the cross can be explained with the help of this notion; in his human nature God has a simulacrum of a stain in virtue of bearing the sins of all humankind.

**63.** Together with Kessler (2002).

**64.** The documentary chronicling her struggle to come to terms with her legacy can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMlozFNvonE

**65.** Teege and Sellmair (2015).

**66.** There are many video interviews with her available on the internet. One of these can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIcb_Uh3ciY

**67.** Zahavi discusses cases of this sort as instances of group identification. As he argues, shame can arise because a person accepts a certain group identity and some notable members in that group merit shame. See Zahavi (2025, 41). His discussion is helpful, but it does not entirely explain the phenomenon of social shame since the reasons for anyone's accepting the merited shame of others in one's group still needs explanation.

**68.** The example of Göth's family is not an isolated case. Others can be found, for example, among the children of other high-ranking Nazis, many of whom were still very young when the war ended. When they became adult, some of these children felt a responsibility to do something to make up for what their Nazi family members had done. For example, the nephew of Reinhard Heydrich (Himmler's second in command) said,

'I began to feel this guilt when, only weeks after the war, I saw the photographs and read what had been done. ... This feeling of responsibility only intensified over the next twenty years.' (Sereny 2001, 305–306.)

Martin Borman (the son of Hitler's villainous assistant, who was also named Martin Borman) was fifteen when the war ended, but he devoted much of the rest of his life to compensating for the evil his father had done. He told Sereny,

'Some fifty years ago ... a few people created horror, but far too many, knowing about it, tolerated it ... The obscenity ... will only be stopped if we accept individual responsibility for never in a single instance allowing it to go unchallenged. That, I think, is our task – yes, as our parent's children' (Sereny 2001, 288).

**69.** For a recent survey of some studies showing that the effects of psychological trauma, for example, can be inherited, see Yehuda (2022, 50–55). The author sums up her view of the studies she has done or surveyed by saying, 'Epigenetic inheritances may represent the body's attempts to prepare offspring for challenges similar to those encountered by their parents.' (Yehuda 2022, 55)

**70.** This issue has, of course, been the subject of an extensive literature. For a discussion that is now widely cited, see Gilbert (2000). She describes one reductionist attitude towards communal guilt this way: 'what *is* a group over and above its individual members? What could it be for a *group* to act as opposed to some or all of the group's members acting? As the great sociologist Max Weber roundly states, "There is no such thing as a collective personality which 'acts'." [footnote omitted]. On this view, to speak of collective guilt smacks of "holism". That is, it treats groups as if they were ... things that exist in their own right. To speak this way – it is argued – is philosophically suspect, if not simply unintelligible.' Gilbert (2000, 143). This is a view she goes on to argue against in some detail.

**71.** The easy answer that Americans now living share a prosperity which has at least one source in the wealth generated by the practice of slavery is not a sufficient explanation. German prosperity after the Second World War owed a great deal to American prosperity and so also had at least one source in the past practice of slavery. But we do not expect that the Germans of the post-War period had obligations of reparation for American slavery.

**72.** In personal correspondence, Naomi Eilan has raised a question about how much family relation is needed for a simulacrum of a stain to be passed on from ancestor to descendant. If, for example, Jennifer Teege's granddaughter discovered that Amon Göth was her great-great-grandfather, would her learning stories about him pass the simulacrum of the stain on the soul to her? It seems to me that the answer will depend on how much union there is between that granddaughter and Amon Göth, and that will depend at least in part on the degree of identification the descendent of the wrongdoer has with her ancestor. Eilan has also raised a question whether there could be an analogous transmission of positive characteristics. If, for example, Jennifer Teege were to discover that one of her paternal ancestors had been a greatly admired king of a territory in Africa, would that recognition transfer to her something like a simulacrum of honour, in her sight or in anybody else's? Here too I would say that the answer to the question depends on the degree of union and identification between a person and her ancestor. But these are just suggestions; the issues raised by Eilan's excellent questions are too complicated to be dealt with in passing here.

**73.** There is a connection here with the history of interpretation of the doctrine of original sin. Some interpreters of that doctrine did in fact think that communal punishment was appropriate as a response to the wrongdoing of even just one member of a subsistent whole composed of individual human beings. Michael Rea attributes to

Jonathan Edwards just such a willingness to endorse communal punishment for the sin of Adam; see Rea (2007, 319–356).

**74.** ST I q.43 a.3.

**75.** SCG IV.21.

**76.** SCG IV.23.

**77.** See, in this connection, ST I-II q.27 a.3 and q.28 a.1.

**78.** For a detailed argument for this claim, see Stump (2011a). See also Stump (2011b).

**79.** ST II-II q.45 a.1. The question of ST at issue is on wisdom as a gift. The first article asks whether wisdom should be numbered among the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and Aquinas, of course, answers in the affirmative.

**80.** ST II–II q.45 a.2.

**81.** ST I–II q.68 a.2.

**82.** Compare here Zahavi's view of the kind of bond needed for the constitution of a *we.* He says,

'What is distinctive and unique about communal experiences and we-experiences [*Gemeinschafts- und Wirerlebnisse*] is precisely that they "come about *on the basis of my unification with the others*, from them *in me* and of me *in them*, from us – *in me, as in them*" (Walther 1923: 72)' (Zahavi 2025, 10–11). The citation is from Walther

(1923, 1–158); ed. and tr. by Luft & Parker (2024).

**83.** *Super Johan*, C.17 L.3

**84.** And, of course, there are many other places also. Speaking of the communal character of language, Annette Baier says, 'Hobbes says that "the first author of speech was God himself, that instructed Adam". ... [But] it seems to me that it would take a many-personed God to author speech.' (Baier 1997, 41). I am grateful to Dan Zahavi for calling my attention to this passage.

**85.** On the doctrine of simplicity, God is both *esse* (being itself) and also *id quod est* (that is, an *ens*, a concrete particular, an entity). Aquinas explains that because in this life we cannot comprehend how something could be both of these, we do not know the nature of God; but we do know that sometimes we should use abstract universal terms to refer to the Deity (e.g., 'God is love') and sometimes we should use concrete particular terms (e.g., 'God is loving'). Both such statements are true, but the modes of speaking (the *modus dicendi*, as Aquinas puts it) are inaccurate and so do not license the usual implications from the statements (e.g., it is not true that love is loving). The doctrine of the Trinity is analogous. In each case, something like quantum metaphysics is required for the theological doctrines in question. The difficulties that C.S. Lewis's Senior Tempter notes with regard to union in love are the mirror image of the difficulties of such quantum metaphysics in theology. For union in love between two human persons, there needs to be one *this something* which does not blend the human persons within it into something like Star Trek's Borg.

In John Zizioulas's attempt to deal with the metaphysical status of God, the church, and human beings in the church, he is concerned to show that each has to be understood as a plurality. For example, with regard to God, he says:

'The being of God is a relational being; without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God ... . It would be unthinkable to speak of the "one God" before speaking of the God who is "communion," that is to say, of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is a *primordial* ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it, as is the case in the dogmatic manuals of the West...' Zizioulas (1985, 17).

And the title of Zizioulas's book, *Being as Communion*, highlights the same central idea.

But, from a Thomist point of view, Zizioulas's idea seems to lose the paradoxical character of the doctrine of simplicity and so also of the notion of union. The persons of the Trinity are not prior to the unity of the Deity, whose unity is not prior to the persons of the Trinity either. And, analogously, the notion of union in love requires maintaining what, as C.S. Lewis saw, looks perilously like a contradiction in terms: there is one thing which is somehow still two things. However exactly the Borg is to be distinguished from union in love, it requires maintaining a paradoxical claim of that sort. From a Thomist point of view, God is not a relational being but rather *being* itself, which on the doctrine of simplicity is also a being in three persons. I am grateful to Michael Rea for calling Zizioulas's book to my attention and prompting me to try to distinguish the Thomist view I am outlining in this article from Zizioulas's central idea.

**86.** There are, of course, well-known, controverted passages in the Hebrew Bible in which it seems that God is using the first-person plural or in which it seems that the one God is being represented as a plurality of persons. See, for example, Gen. 1:26 for the first sort of case and Gen. 18 for the second. The Jewish tradition takes the first person plural in Gen.1:26 as a reference to God and the angels, and it interprets the plurality of persons in Gen. 18 also in terms of angels; see the summary of Jewish commentary given in *Bereishis*, vol. 1, (Zlotowitz 2009). In the Patristic period, it was not uncommon to take the first-person plural in Gen.1:26 as a reference to the Trinity. So, for example, Chrysostom recognizes the Jewish tradition of interpretation of Gen. 1:26, but he rejects it in favour

of a reading that takes the first-person plural to refer to the Father and the Son (John Chrysostom 1999, 107–109). I am grateful to Patrick Zoll for calling my attention to the need to make this point explicit.

**87.** *Super Johan*, C.17 L.5.

**88.** This translation is the result of my fussing with existent, well-known translations on the basis of my own construal of the Greek.

**89.** *Super Johan*, C.17 L.5.

**90.** *Super Johan*, C.17 L.3.

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