

Response to Eleonore Stump's "Union and Indwelling"

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Initial Remarks

The rich reflections that Professor Stump shares in her paper on "Union and Indwelling"¹ invite, and merit, attentive and serious reflection. Of course, not the least value of her remarks is their intelligent account of the nature of human empathy and its foundation in cognitive perception. There seems no reason not to embrace her account of the Thomistic analysis of love into the component elements of willing the good of the beloved, and willing union with the beloved.² This is likewise the case with her observation that for God the willing of the creature's union with God, and the willing of the good for that person, are identical.³ While there are questions of scope that could be raised regarding "being in the company of" another—something that seems amenable both to very thin, and very thick, readings, as for example one recollects the phrase, "being among the company of the righteous"—nonetheless, her account distinguishing mere proximity from the reciprocal shared attentiveness of those who love one another is unassailable.

¹ Eleonore Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 343–361 in this issue of *Nova et Vetera* (originally given on July 12, 2017, at the Dominican Colloquium in Berkeley on "Person, Soul and Consciousness").

² Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 344.

³ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 346.

Along the way of her remarks one does happen upon a strategic theological consideration touching a subject that runs like a seismic event affecting the theological landscape. Here one observes her formulation of the relative role of the creature, and of the divine permissive decree of evil, with respect to grace and the divine good. Professor Stump affirms that, "If Jerome does not resist God's love, then God's love is productive of goodness in Jerome, not responsive to the goodness Jerome has already produced in himself by himself."⁴ Yet she also states that "Even on Aquinas's resolutely anti-Pelagian views, because Jerome can always resist the love of God, God's bringing about goodness in Jerome is responsive to *something* in Jerome."⁵ On the one hand, Professor Stump's embrace of the anti-Pelagian intention is pronounced and salutary. On the other hand, normally one would wish to observe at this point that her formulation appears to share the kind of problems that may be found both in Maritain's account of the permission of evil, and in the philosophy of logic of Gottlob Frege.⁶ The proposition that God bestows grace, and that if only the creature does "not negate" grace, the creature will *then* "receive grace," is somewhat like saying that God bestows to the creature a nose, and if only the creature does not *not* have a nose, *then* the creature will have a real nose. In other words, the formulation presents as causal what is not causal, because *in a real subject, negation of negation is something positive*. This means that for a real person not to negate grace is nothing different from having actually received grace, any more than not *not* to have a nose can be anything different in a real subject from *having a nose*.⁷ Thus there is more to the theological story here than simply the creature with its hand on the tiller, as the question of the divine *permission* of evil is not permission in the garden variety sense in which one person may "permit" another to do something. This is without prejudice to Dr. Stump's observation that "even

⁴ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 346.

⁵ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 347.

⁶ See Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J. L. Austin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), no. 54: "In this respect existence is analogous to number. An affirmation of existence is in fact nothing other than a denial of the number zero. Because existence is a property of concepts the ontological argument for the existence of God fails to conclude. But uniqueness is not a component characteristic of the concept of God any more than existence is."

⁷ Of course, in a non-real subject, negation of negation does not imply the opposed positive: the proposition that "no thousand winged fire-breathing pumpkin does not sing La Traviata at midnight" does not imply one actually existing creature of this kind (presuming that there is no such actual creature). But in a real subject, negation of negation implies the positive that is negated.

on anti-Pelagian views, Jerome has alternative possibilities for willing with regard to God's giving him grace"⁸—but this presupposes extensive consideration both of the nature of free will and of its relation to God. By the divine simplicity, it is not possible for God to bring about an entirely indeterminate effect—which would be indistinguishable from God bringing about no effect whatsoever, thus nullifying divine causality. Of course, my reference to Frege above is a reference to his famed observation that "being is only the negation of nought," which suffers the exact same lack of distinction between conceptual and real "negation of negation."

Morally speaking, it is true that we may distinguish between acting, non-action by reason of a positive judgment—the sense in which *not to act* is itself a moral act—and non-action *simpliciter* apart from any deliberated principle or indebtedness to the positivity of particular judgment. Yet the ontological positivity of the predilection of the will as a perfection—and any kind or degree of created agency whatsoever—lies within the divine providential causality. Between being and nonbeing there is not a third, and the totality of being outside of *esse subsistens per se* is, in its ontological positivity, an *effect* of divine causality. Thus, the true proposition that "God's bringing about goodness in Jerome is responsive to *something* in Jerome" must also add that this *something* is both from Jerome as second cause and from God as primary cause: the creature enjoys no perfection of which God is not the first and principal cause. Indeed, as St. Thomas writes in the *Summa contra gentiles* (bk. III, ch. 67): "Sed omnis applicatio virtutis ad operationem est principaliter et primo a Deo"—"But every application of power to operation is principally and first from God." It is not a textual secret that for St. Thomas Aquinas this includes every contingent application of the power of the human will in free choice. Such choice is denominated as "free" inasmuch as the connatural objects of the will do not and cannot compel it, while nonetheless the least actuation of the human free will is an effect of divine efficient causality. Thomas teaches that the will is ordered to *universal good* and *cannot be fully actuated or compelled by any finite object*, inasmuch as knowledge of every finite object is compatible with viewing it as in some way "not good."⁹ Further, as he argues in many places, for example, in *De malo* (in q. 16, a. 7, ad 15), *contingency and necessity are discriminated not in relation to the first cause, but in relation to the proximate cause*. A contingent cause is changeable so as to bring about a great variety of effects, while a necessary cause is unchangeable and brings about one effect. By reason of its rational nature, the will

⁸ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 347.

⁹ *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 82, a. 2, ad 2.

in choosing is a radically contingent cause insusceptible of complete actuation or compulsion by any finite good, although it does have a necessary and natural motion to the good in general and toward happiness. Yet *every choice* (and every volition) *lies wholly within the divine causality such that the least actuation of the will derives from the divine motion*. As St. Thomas insists in one among several places (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3): “Every motion whether of the will or of nature proceeds from God as the first mover.” He makes clear in many places that he is speaking of agent causality, for example, in ST, I, q. 22, a. 2, resp.: “But the causality of God, who is the first agent, extends to all being, not only as to constituent principles of species, but also as to the individualizing principles; not only of things incorruptible, but also of things corruptible.”¹⁰

Hence whatever is ontologically positive in the cooperation of the creature with grace is itself a gift of grace, without any limitation to the creature’s freedom.

But if we speak of grace as it signifies a help from God to move us to good, no preparation is required on man’s part, that, as it were, anticipates the divine help, but rather, every preparation in man must be by the help of God moving the soul to good. And thus even the good movement of the free-will, whereby anyone is prepared for receiving the gift of grace is an act of the free-will moved by God. And thus man is said to prepare himself, according to Pr 16:1: “It is the part of man to prepare the soul”; yet it is principally from God, who moves the free-will. Hence it is said that man’s will is prepared by God, and that man’s steps are guided by God.¹¹

Here one recalls the Council of Trent referring to God “whose goodness toward all men is such that he wants his own gifts to be their merits” —

¹⁰ “Causalitas autem Dei, qui est primum agens, se extendit usque ad omnia entia, non solum quantum ad principia speciei, sed etiam quantum ad individualia principia, non solum incorruptibilem, sed etiam corruptibilem.”

¹¹ ST I-II, q. 112, a. 2, resp.: “Sed si loquamur de gratia secundum quod significat auxilium Dei moventis ad bonum, sic nulla praeparatio requiritur ex parte hominis quasi praeveniens divinum auxilium; sed potius quaecumque praeparatio in homine esse potest, est ex auxilio Dei moventis animam ad bonum. Et secundum hoc ipse bonus motus liberi arbitrii quo quis praeparatur ad donum gratiae suscipiendum, est actus liberi arbitrii moti a Deo; et quantum ad hoc, dicitur homo se praeparare, secundum illud Prov. XVI: ‘Hominis est praeparare animum.’ Et est principaliter a Deo movente liberum arbitrium; et secundum hoc dicitur ‘a Deo voluntas hominis praeparari,’ et ‘a Dominio gressus hominis dirigi.’”

"cuius tanta est erga omnes homines bonitas, ut eorum velit esse merita, quae sunt ipsius dona."¹²

Because fuller consideration of this question would preclude engaging with objects in Professor Stump's lecture of more primary importance to this lecture itself, it seems reasonable to move onward to the heart of her analysis rather than linger at the periphery. And this is so even though, taken in a wider context, this subject is objectively of the greatest importance, and despite the circumambient danger of falling into forgetfulness regarding the divine transcendence, and the divine simplicity, both of which render it impossible that, in relation to the simple divine will, grace not be a determinate effect.

Second-Person Presence

Professor Stump's distinction between mere physico-temporal presence, and the kind of shared attention requisite for intense presence "to" or "with" another, seems to me remarkably fine in its motion from ordinary experience to the formal intentional aspects of empathy and what she calls "mind-reading"—a phrase that confessedly to me seems less felicitous than simple "anticipation" or "understanding" of another's dispositions. Still, it brings out the aspect that something occurring in one person is somehow present to another in an intentional form which reveals to that second person something of the feelings and emotional dispositions of the first person. The statement that "In typically functioning human beings, mind-reading yields a non-propositional, direct and immediate intuitive knowledge of persons and their mental states"¹³ does raise questions of scope. That is to say, what is the *extent* to which mental states are directly observable? If this is to say only that *some* such knowledge is part of the ordinary human repertoire, the claim is unexceptionable. But were one to think that mental states were in general directly perceptible, this would seem to understate the role of intentional disclosure in personal relations. However, the perception that personal life is on a continuum, from that which is directly perceivable to that which is private in the sense that it can only be revealed by the person but not simply "intuited," seems consistent with the account of "shared attention."

The exploration of personal knowledge—and of connaturality achieved *via* friendship—in terms of contemporary neural science is fascinating.

¹² Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 1548, from ch. 16 of the Decree on Justification from the Council of Trent.

¹³ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 351.

But it is with respect to the analogical extension of this consideration to God that the analysis encounters difficulty, especially with respect to the following observation of Professor Stump:

And so although God can know *that* Jerome intends to shake Paula's hand, it seems that he cannot mind-read Jerome's intention in the direct and intuitive way Paula can.¹⁴

She continues, arguing that "A human psyche is too small and God's mind is too great, one might say, for God to contain human mental states within himself in the shared way the relevant neural system enables as between human beings."¹⁵ So, "the sharing and the presence with a person that is the hallmark of the knowledge of persons is ruled out for God."¹⁶ Yet she notes that these appearances are misleading, because owing to the Incarnation, "through the assumed human nature of Christ, God can have empathy with human persons and can also mind-read them, since God can use the human mind of the assumed human nature to know human persons" such that "for every human person, God can also be present with her in this way."¹⁷ Thus "the Chalcedonian formula for the incarnate Christ gives a way of explaining and defending God's knowledge of persons through mind-reading and the presence with a human person that God's mind reading enables God to have."¹⁸

Difficulties

About this and the consequent extension to the question of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it seems to me that there are *two significant difficulties, the second multi-dimensional*. As to the first, there is no need to deny the human empathy of Christ, and thus no need to deny that this belongs in a *sui generis* way to the second person of the Trinity through the assumed human nature. The difficulty is more in what seems to be missed in this formulation. The first thing that arguably is missed, is that the properly divine knowledge of God is indeed infinitely more perfect and comprehensive than any human knowledge, including empathetic knowledge. Professor Stump's formulation does affirm that the knowledge of God is "too great" to contain human mental states within itself. But the implication of "too great" does

¹⁴ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 355.

¹⁵ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 355.

¹⁶ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 355.

¹⁷ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 355.

¹⁸ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 355.

not seem to be fully appropriated: namely, that human empathy constitutes an *inferior* knowledge, a knowledge *less* comprehensive and intimate—of the human person by comparison with divine knowledge. The focus on empathy *could* be taken as offering a purely anthropocentric *ratio* for the Incarnation, that is, as implying that God needs the Incarnation to love human creatures empathetically: whereas, in reality, humanity needs the Incarnation to love and worship God in a divinely mediated way, and everything that is perfective in empathy seems to be possessed more perfectly in properly divine “non-empathetic” knowledge.

This is simply to say what Augustine and Thomas Aquinas teach,¹⁹ that *God is closer to the creature than it is to itself*. God is the source of every created good, but also, as the one who sustains and actuates the creature in all its motions toward the good, is aware of human misery with a completeness that the human mind as such does not begin to approach. It is true that this is not “empathy” in the sense of a neural configuration permitting a sharing in human dispositions. And it is true that it *is* a virtue for human persons to “suffer with” our friends, and to “bear their sorrows.” Yet the condition for God being present to every person as infinitely wise and loving healer and redeemer is precisely the infinite divine perfection and consequent perfect liberty of God from all evil. God’s knowledge possesses supereminently and formally whatever there is of perfection in empathetic knowledge, without possessing its created limitations. It is for the sake of the redemption and elevation of the human creature that human nature and its empathetic capacity is assumed by the divine Word, but not because the intimate, tender, and comprehensive loving knowledge of God requires any further perfection.

When the woman strained to touch the cloak of Jesus, she did not do so in the hope that he could feel precisely in the way that she felt, but in the hope of being healed and restored, yearning for a fullness of life. Likewise, the woman at the well did not inquire about Our Lord’s empathy, and was drawn to the water that slakes all thirst (John 4:14): “Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him

¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.34: “Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo”—“But you, you were deeper than my inmost being and higher than my greatest height.” Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 8, a. 1, resp.: “Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt, ut ex supra dictis patet. Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime”—“Existence is most intimate/innermost in each that which is deepest in all things, because it is formal with respect to all that is in a thing, as has been shown above. Thus it is necessary that God is in all things most intimately/innermost.”

a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” We would think it odd were the woman to have responded: “Yes, that is all fine and good, but does God feel about this as do I?” Christ’s empathy follows upon his humanity, but one might think that the divine knowledge in Christ is and should be infinitely more consoling to the human person than any such human knowledge.

Thus there is no denial of the perfection of the divine knowledge in Professor Stump’s fine paper—quite the contrary. Yet, there also does not seem to be a clear affirmation that God possesses, as it were, the full intuitive perfection of which human empathy is merely a spark—perfect love and wisdom extending to every human condition and ill, healing, redeeming, and elevating. God qua God does not possess the same disposition of empathy with human persons, because this disposition requires matter which limits its perfection. But just as one would not say that the Eucharist is not a sufficient menu, inasmuch as it does not minister univocally to the same human needs as celebrated in *Babette’s Feast*, so it seems odd to speak of the Incarnation principally in terms of Christ’s human powers of empathy subsequent upon the assumption of human nature by the Word. Thus when Professor Stump writes: “So, the Chalcedonian formula for the incarnate Christ gives a way of explaining and defending God’s knowledge of persons through mind-reading and the presence with a human person that God’s mind-reading enables God to have”²⁰ we might concur, while nonetheless considering that because God is more present to each person than that person is to himself, this is a more perfect presence than any constricted mode of empathy could be. Yet this does not obviate the truth of the proposition that God in Christ does possess human empathy.

However, it is not merely with respect to the perfection of divine knowledge as such, but with respect to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that further questions arise. Here the difficulty seems to consist in a *limitation of consideration* that calls for *complementary judgements* to give an adequate picture.

This second problem I would present in terms of three related considerations. First, the emphasis upon conscious awareness as opposed to being, and upon the moral effects of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—upon conscious acts and love—occurs without reference to the more primary essential effects of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling. *This could be misconstrued as reducing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and unitive love, to a psychic state of consciousness.*

Also, by his atonement, Christ fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law—not merely the moral precepts, but the ceremonial precepts, and the judicial

²⁰ Stump, “Union and Indwelling,” 355.

precepts.²¹ The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is mediated. Thus *secondly*, this problem also pertains to the relative absence of essential soteriological judgments that are more primary than those regarding conscious awareness and are presupposed to this aspect of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. This may be merely a methodological limit, dictated by the object of engagement. But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is essentially mediated by Christ's atonement. Thus one notes the importance of Christ's satisfaction vis-à-vis the Passion, of sin as an *impediment* to union with God, and of the need for this impediment to be removed *if one is to achieve union of charity* with the infinitely perfect God. Sin introduces not merely disorder, but a *debitum* of just punishment, and this must be removed. Without the essential relation of suffering in Christ to Christ's love and obedience (ST III, q. 48, a. 2), the *atonement—the passion as redemptive inasmuch as Christ offers to God something infinitely more valuable than sacrifice taken separately*, namely sacrifice *proceeding from obedience*—does not occur. For similar reasons, Christ's perpetual presence in the Eucharist is stressed by Aquinas under the aspect of friendship,²² because friends need *to be together*, a togetherness with the God who is infinitely perfect beatitude that cannot occur for so long as the person is disordered in sin. The Holy Spirit purifies, elevates, and "supernaturalizes" the person, rendering the person to be a fit subject for actions that are supernaturally meritorious. These characteristics of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit seem foundational.

This brings me to the third aspect under which this selfsame difficulty arises, namely, in regard to the Holy Spirit's indwelling itself. Professor Stump rightly notes that "The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is meant to be something ontologically more powerful than mutual closeness accompanied by intense shared attention."²³ Yet despite the proposition that "the immaterial God cannot be contained within a material container," the emphasis is placed upon "God's being somehow within the psyches of those who are in grace."²⁴ Of course, the "somehow" is crucial: I have long thought that *secundum quid* is the most sublimely helpful of all Latin phrases. Yet metaphysically viewed, *the Holy Spirit is present owing to the ad extra missions of the persons of the Trinity and by the Holy Spirit's distinctive operation in the human soul*, whereby the person is purified, elevated, and the person's life and actions are *supernaturalized*—hence the Gifts. Only as *following upon* this soteriologically mediated operation of the Holy Spirit

²¹ ST III, q. 47, a. 2, ad 1.

²² ST III, q. 75, a. 1.

²³ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 357.

²⁴ Stump, "Union and Indwelling," 357.

do the unitive *fruits* of peace and love come to be. *All this is in virtue of the divine mediation and satisfaction of Christ, and so again draws our attention to the manner in which God removes the impediment of sin to our final good.*

Conclusion

It is a characteristic of fruitful analyses such as those of Professor Stump that they suggest further considerations. The transcendence and primacy of the divine causality; the infinite perfection of divine knowledge; the essential mediation of the entire order of grace by the atoning Passion of Christ as removing the impediment of sin that would otherwise block union with God; and the distinctive operation of the Holy Spirit in elevating the person and supernaturalizing the person's action, are perhaps such considerations.

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