Will the Structural Theory of the Image of God Survive Evolution?

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Traditionally, Christian theology has assigned humans a special place in creation and salvation history. Humans are the only beings in creation who have been formed in the *imago Dei*, or image of God. This uniqueness has often been understood in terms of each human having been endowed with a soul that provides a unique personality and a set of mental capacities. There are a number of different ways to understand what souls are and how they function, and I will return to these views in more detail below. The view that being the image of God consists of being a person with certain mental capacities that reflect, or are somehow analogous to, God’s capacities is what we here call the structural theory of the image of God (STIG).\(^1\) Unlike other views of the

\(^1\) Sometimes it is also called the substantial theory or the soul theory.
image of God, such as the relational and functional theories, the structural theory identifies the image of God in humans with the soul and the set of capacities that the soul endows each person.

In this chapter, I will examine the kinds of challenges that an evolutionary understanding of humans might produce for SID and suggest that a properly modified version of SID will have the resources to deal with them—or at least that it is just as capable as any of the other theories of the image of God at meeting the challenges posed by evolution.²

The Structural Theory of the Image of God

STIG, or some variant thereof, was the default position of Christian theologians and philosophers for the majority of Christian history until the twentieth century.³ Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin hold versions of STIG. According to STIG, the image of God is some shared feature of divine and human nature such that humans reflect God’s nature by having this shared feature. As mentioned above, these features are often associated with personhood and certain mental capacities, such as the capacities for abstract thought and moral autonomy. This reflection is far from perfect, but there is an analogy between God’s being and human being.


³ The following discussion is based mostly on Mark Cortez, Theological Anthropology: A Guide to the Perplexed (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 18–19, 37–40. See also J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), chap. 3.
Theologians have usually assumed that the special relationship derived from this shared feature is unique to humans and God, though there have been theological debates from time to time about whether, for instance, angels (who seem to have personhood and abstract thought) qualify as images of God as well. In what follows, I will put the question of angels aside and focus on God, humans, and nonhuman animals.

According to STIG, humans reflect God by having certain kinds of capacities that are uniquely human. Traditionally these capacities have been associated with rationality and intellect. These capacities not only make rational action possible but also make it possible for humans to grasp abstract and universal truths and respond to the revelation of God in the life of Christ. By virtue of their intellect and rationality, humans become free, morally responsible persons, who transcend their animal nature and, in so doing, can relate to God in a special way.4

On this account, then, the image of God relates to the development of personhood. There are many ways to fill in the details regarding the metaphysics of personhood.5 Traditionally, structural theories have been committed to either substance dualism (the Augustinian tradition) or compound dualism (the Thomistic tradition). According to both forms of dualism, the nonphysical soul is the seat of reason and intellect. Here the analogy between the nonphysical nature of the intellect and God’s mind comes into play. God is a perfectly rational and free person, and by virtue of their nonphysical, intellectual souls humans also have intellect and freedom that are analogous to those of God.

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5 For an accessible overview of the development of imago Dei doctrine, see Dominic Robinson, Understanding the “Imago Dei”: The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), chap. 1.
Although physicalism—the view that minds and persons consist solely of basic physical parts (like atoms, brains, and bodies)—is the dominant view in current analytic philosophy, defenses of dualism occur frequently. There is room for dualist accounts today, and critiques of strong forms of physicalism are now more common than ever. In addition, there are good responses to the standard critiques of dualism, such as the interaction problem. Indeed, Christians have more resources (and reasons) to defend dualism than their non-Christian colleagues.

Regarding the scriptural basis of STIG, the tradition takes the Genesis narrative as a starting point. However, twentieth-century biblical scholarship has argued that the Genesis account should be interpreted in a more functionalist way. The image of God is to be found in God’s special calling and aim for humanity as a whole. This is one of the main reasons many contemporary theologians reject STIG. Yet, as Mark Harris’s chapter in this book on the functional theory of the image of God suggests, the “physical” likeness of God and humans does indeed play some role in the Genesis account. Minimally, this supports the conclusion that “image language” of the Genesis cannot be completely detached from the idea of likeness.


8 See, e.g., Joel Green, Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2008).
Furthermore, John Cooper has argued extensively that although biblical anthropology is clearly more holistic than dualist Greek and Roman accounts, basic scriptural commitments to, say, life after death, imply something like persons existing without their physical bodies. Hence, dualism and STIG might be more endemic to the biblical witness than is often claimed.\(^9\)

STIG also makes sense of a number of other theological doctrines and commitments. For instance, it solves how individuals can survive their bodily deaths and become embodied in new, incorruptible bodies. Moreover, it is built on an idea of personhood that is closely connected to central Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and incarnation.\(^{10}\) The main motivation behind STIG, however, is that it explains why only humans have a special relationship with God. According to STIG, humans are *Homo religiosus*, a religious species that seeks God.\(^{11}\)

In twentieth-century theological anthropology, many have become critical of STIG and suggested a number of alternatives, such as relational and functional accounts of the image of


\(^{11}\) Theologians disagree about how the fall altered the image of God. All agree that sin has corrupted some of the capacities of the soul (will and desire), but defenders of SID usually maintain that reason and intellect were not lost in the fall. Their operation might be impaired in a number of different ways because of the disordering of other faculties but our fallen human intellect nevertheless largely reflects God’s image.
God. However, it seems to me that especially the functional and relational accounts are not really alternatives to STIG because, as with STIG, they also seem to entail, or at least to strongly imply, something like uniquely human capacities for reason and intellect. Let me explain.

One central criticism of STIG is its alleged ethical problem. If an individual somehow lacks basic rationality and intellect (because of a disability, for instance), this person seems to reflect God less than a fully functioning individual. Although this objection is often wielded against STIG, it also cuts against the functional and relational theories. In the functional theory, the *imago Dei* is to be located in God’s call and task: humans are to participate in taking care of the creation. It seems to me that this view implies that humans are indeed capable of, first, hearing and responding to God’s call and, second, participating in this work with God. How is this possible? I think a good case could be made that it is the capacities that STIG describes (e.g., intellect and moral judgment) that make it possible for humans to understand and respond to God and freely participate in the venture that God is calling them to.

The same applies to the relational theory, according to which the *imago Dei* in humans is based on the kinds of relational properties (relationships with God and other humans) that humans possess. Being able to have meaningful personal and moral relationships requires something like personhood and the basic communicative and intellectual capacities associated

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13 This is also suggested by Stenmark, “Is There A Human Nature?”, Crisp, “A Christological Model of the *Imago Dei*."

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with it. This leaves the relational account, as with the functional account, open to the same ethical objection as STIG in this case. There are plenty of people who do not have the necessary capacities to engage in taking care of creation, responding to God’s call, or participating in personal relationships with other humans and God in any explicit way. If defenders of the functional or relational theories appeal to the possibility of such individuals potentially having these capacities or reflecting the image of God as parts of the human community, these defenses should be open to STIG as well: people lacking fully developed intellects are images of God because they have the potential to develop such capacities, have human souls, and belong to a community of humans. STIG is in no way worse off in this respect than the functional and relational theories, which are entirely dependent on the structural model for their own coherence.

To recap, the distinctive features of STIG are human uniqueness and mind-body dualism—namely, that humans are endowed with a supernatural soul. The human soul shares with God features that make it a person, such as rationality or intellect. According to STIG, humans are distinguished from nonhuman animals by possessing a set of capacities that nonhuman animals seem to lack.

**Two Evolutionary Challenges**

STIG has fallen out of favor in theological circles the last century, and this is due in part to evolutionary accounts of humanity. There are two ways evolution challenges STIG. First, it seems that the capacities for intellect and moral autonomy that in STIG ground the imaging relation between God and humans can now be given a naturalistic, evolutionary explanation. We can now, so the argument goes, explain the emergence of such human capacities without any recourse to supernatural causes or explanations. Evolutionary psychologists, for instance, are
exploring the evolution of our cognition, cultural forms, and behavioral patterns. Writers like Steven Pinker maintain that the basic architecture of the human mind consists of a number of different mechanisms that developed to solve problems in our ancestral environments. Our capacity for moral behavior and moral emotions, for instance, is a product of the selective pressures toward increased cooperation and collaboration. Similarly, our capacity for abstract reasoning is a product of our need to coordinate behavior in ever expanding human groups. In sum, if evolutionary psychology indeed succeeds, there is no need for a supernatural explanation of human mental capacities.

Second, human uniqueness can be challenged by invoking the ubiquitous evidence we have about the evolutionary roots of the human species. The evolutionary sciences claim—and I agree—that humans did not appear from nothing but share a history and a set of basic cognitive and biological capacities with other living beings. As such, there is no clear dividing line between human and nonhuman animals.

In what follows, I explain these two problems in more detail and offer an account of STIG that will solve them.

**Dualism, Evolution, and the Brain**

It might seem that, if it is indeed the case humans have evolved, this casts doubt on the claim that humans have souls (or are souls) as STIG entails. Evolution might call dualism into question in at least two different ways. First, the general plausibility of dualism is called into question in light of evolutionary explanations of our mental capacities. Second, if one looks at

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the archaeological record, one sees no evidence of souls being put into human organisms in some supernatural way. We do indeed see occasional leaps of evolution: after long periods of stability we often observe a burst of change in culture and behavioral patterns. However, there seems to be no single, empirically identifiable point where souls are added into the historical mix.

There are several ways in which the defender of STIG could deal with these worries. I think the best way would be to look more carefully at what souls are and what they actually do. Although it might be possible to defend a version of STIG that would entail the creation of souls from nothing, I suggest that we should give this up and adopt a more moderate form of dualism where souls are forms of bodies or emergent substances.

First, we need to do some groundwork on basic concepts. Let us distinguish property dualism from substance dualism. Property dualists think that only physical substances exist but some properties that these substances have are more or less nonphysical. Against this, substance dualists believe that in addition to physical substances there are nonphysical substances as well. There is a distinction to be made here between substances (individuals existing in their own right) and properties of those substances. In property dualism, there are only physical substances like human bodies, trees and stones. Some properties that these substances have (e.g., being of a certain shape, color, or softness) are physical properties in the sense that they are organizations of simple physical properties posited by contemporary theories of physics (atoms, forces, etc.).

But some properties are nonphysical like mass and force. Mental properties are here understood as properties like “believing that it will rain tomorrow” or “thinking about one’s lost love.” For the property dualist, mental properties are nonphysical properties.

Opposed to property dualism, substance dualists maintain that in addition to material substances like bodies and brains, there are mental substances as well. This is what is traditionally called the soul: essentially a thinking thing. There are many different versions of substance dualism, but they all share two features: (1) for every thinking person, there is such a thing as a soul that lacks most physical properties of the body and other nonthinking substances, and (2) this soul is essential to the person and to a large extent responsible for the person’s mental life.16

Substance dualism takes the mental substance as the essential mark of personhood: persons are essentially mental beings. More precisely, human persons are identical to essentially nonphysical souls and only contingently have physical bodies. Contrary to this, a third form of dualism, compound dualism, does not identify persons with a nonphysical mental substance but rather describes persons as composites of form (soul) and matter (body). In other words, the compound dualist would resist identifying the person with the mental only. Body and soul are both required for human persons to exist and function.17


17 This does not mean that all theories of personhood are “mentalistic” or “psychological.” Defenders of animalism argue that to be a human person is to be identical with a human animal (human organism). See Eric Olson, What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
No dualist would deny the close connection between the soul and the brain. All contemporary dualists accept the idea that physical changes in the brain affect mental functioning. The brain and the soul are not insulated from each other, but rather there is a close dependency in terms of function. Although classical compound dualists believe that higher-level mental functions—such as rational reflection—cannot be performed by any purely physical system, they nevertheless insist that the kind of mental functions that neurosciences and cognitive sciences study (perception, memory, language skills, emotion, attention, etc.) are rooted in and performed by the body.18

Those who hold to a view known as emergent dualism, such as William Hasker, argue that the soul is indeed a mental substance of its own right and contributes to thinking more extensively than simply shaping the body; however, as Hasker describes, they hold that the soul is not supernaturally created but emerges from the central nervous system after it reaches a certain level of complexity. The soul is thus a part of the natural order of things in the world. The soul has a location within the human body and depends on the functions of the body for its existence and functioning. As with other dualists, Hasker thinks that the substantial soul is what

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makes human bodies persons: the soul is the seat of the first-person perspective and activity, guaranteeing the unity of the person and her consciousness.19

We can now see how contemporary dualists could answer the evolutionary challenges presented above. First, they could maintain that evolutionary psychologists and other scientists are indeed making progress in finding out how human cognition works but that this does not mean that the scientific picture completely explains human mental life. Being in the image of God is not a competing explanation with the evolutionary story for basic human mental capacities. Souls do a different explanatory job than evolutionary explanations. Evolutionary psychologists seek to explain why our perceptual, conceptual, and emotional systems work the way they do in terms of their selective advantages in our ancestral environments. In contrast, souls are responsible for mental processes that do not map onto the physical in any systematic way. Souls account for phenomena like the existence of the person and his or her self-consciousness, the unity of consciousness, the qualitative aspects of consciousness, intentionality, human dignity and value, and survival after death. In this sense, evolutionary psychology explains the raw material of our mental life but not the first-person perspective that our mental life presumes.

Second, dualists have no particular problem responding to the challenge from the continuity of the archeological record. Dualists readily admit that souls are emergent and depend on the function of the body and the brain. When bodies and brains evolve, various capacities emerge

and get shaped by the environment. What souls add to the mix is the existence of the person: self-consciousness where the outputs of cognitive systems come together. STIG entails that there must be a point where the first human soul emerges—a point in time before which there were no human souls (images of God) and after which there were human souls. The dualist can still maintain that such a point would not necessarily leave a clear mark in the archeological record since the organism in question could exhibit basic cognitive capacities both before and after this point. It would follow from this, however, that we might not be able to clearly pinpoint the exact time in evolutionary history when humans finally became persons and images of God. Nevertheless, such a point could exist.

**Human Uniqueness Regained**

Many theologians think that STIG entails a sharp dividing line between humans and nonhuman animals such that humans are unique. The dividing line is located between those with thought and selfhood and those incapable of it. The problem is that if the Darwinian view of species is correct, there is no clear dividing line between organisms that are capable of thought and selfhood and those who are not.

The issue of human uniqueness is far from simple. First, there are different ways of understanding what “uniqueness” means exactly. One way to understand the notion is to talk about the uniqueness of human performance. This is the most uncontroversial notion of uniqueness. I do not think anyone in their right mind could deny that humans can do things that nonhumans cannot (speak Klingon, invent the internet, build oil tankers, etc.). What is more controversial is whether human performance is based on unique cognitive capacities. It is clear that humans share most of their capacities with many other animals (perception, basic forms of
reasoning, etc.). Uniqueness comes in degrees. All species are clearly unique in the sense that they are different from one another. However, it might be that human capacities differ from those of other animals but are plausibly of the same type or kind or have similar evolutionary histories. There seems to be no clear-cut way of determining at what point a quantitative distinction becomes a qualitative one.20

In what follows, I suggest that the evolutionary human sciences indeed point toward a certain degree of human uniqueness and this should be enough for STIG. I have no space to outline in any detail the state of the debate in evolutionary sciences concerning the boundary between human and nonhuman animals. Primatologists and psychologists are conducting comparative studies of our species and our closest relatives—such as chimpanzees, bonobos, and great apes—and our understanding is expanding rapidly. It is clear that the cognitive, moral, and social capacities of our closest relatives and other nonhuman animals might have been significantly underrated in the past. Capacities that were previously thought to be uniquely human—such as symbolic language, reasoning, morality and consciousness—have proto-forms or at least rudimentary antecedents in our currently living relatives (and in now extinct *Homo* species). For example, our relatives do seem to have various social emotions and instincts that in our case form the basis of our morality. In *Homo sapiens*, these enablers of morality have become much more complex as human groups have gotten bigger and the need for coordination has increased, but they are nevertheless based on the kinds of mechanisms that our close relatives have. This is also the case with language and reasoning.

These results do not mean that the boundary between *Homo sapiens* and nonhuman animals and extinct *Homo* ancestors is somehow indistinguishable or nonexistent. Most scholars working in the area acknowledge some level of human uniqueness: the evolutionary human sciences do not demonstrate equality between *Homo sapiens* and other animals. It is clear that humans are descendants of nonhuman animals, but this fact does not mean that humans are “just animals,” similar to nonhuman animals or not really unique in any way. Indeed, denying the uniqueness or distinctiveness of *Homo sapiens* is to deny evolution altogether: decent does not imply identity or similarity.\(^21\) As biological anthropologist Jonathan Marks puts it succinctly, humans are biocultural ex-apes. Our ancestors were apes, but we are not our ancestors.\(^22\) Cognitive neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga adds that “most human activity can be related to antecedents in animals. But to be swept away by such a fact is to miss the point of human experience. . . . Although we are made up of the same chemicals, with the same physiological reactions, we are very different from other animals. . . . Even though we have all of these connections with the biologic world from which we came, and we have in some instances similar mental structures, we are hugely different.”\(^23\) Similarly, Michael Tomasello, who has spent years doing comparative work on humans and great apes, argues that humans are a “hypersocial” species and human thinking is uniquely social: humans can think about the intentions of others and can

\(^{21}\) This point is forcefully made by Conor Cunningham in his *Darwin’s Pious Idea: Why Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Grand Rapids: Eermans, 2010).


create and regulate social and moral norms. These capacities make it possible for humans to inhabit a shared world of language and cooperation, in turn giving rise to abstract thought, art, religion music, and science.\textsuperscript{24}

The description above does not do justice to the wealth of extremely complex theories and interesting evidence we are now getting from comparative studies. It seems that the sciences indeed point toward many differences not just in cognitive capacities but in the forces that shaped human evolution. Many researchers think that the evolution of our lineage exhibits some unique characteristics that mostly have to do with the extensive interactions between genes and culture as well as a phenomenon called niche-construction.\textsuperscript{25} Human cognition makes it possible to contribute to culture and technology and be shaped by it in extremely flexible ways. Via culture, we make our own environment, which in turn feeds into our biological evolution. In this sense, human evolution takes place in the context of culture and technology: our species responds to pressures not only by developing biological adaptations but also by cultural and technological innovation.\textsuperscript{26}

The ability of biology and psychology to explain how the aforementioned capacities for morality, sociality, and abstract thought arise via biological evolution is not a problem for STIG because giving a biological explanation of our mental capacities would threaten STIG only if

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Michael Tomasello, \textit{A Natural History of Human Thinking} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
  \item \textsuperscript{25} For more on niche-construction, see \textcolor{blue}{chapter 3 above by J. Wentzel van Huyssteen}.
\end{itemize}
STIG entails that our mental capacities are nothing like our physical capacities and are performed solely by the immaterial soul. But as has become clear, dualists need not think this way. Instead, as I have proposed, dualists can affirm that most of our mental capacities are grounded in our evolved bodies, cultures, and social environment.

**Human Uniqueness and Anti-Essentialism**

Evolution presents another deep challenge to human uniqueness that is somewhat more conceptual in nature and has to do with the natures, kinds, and essences of all evolved species. It seems that STIG is committed to the position that there are essential—that is, necessary—features of human nature. The problem is that the evolutionary approach to the human species (and to all species) undermines this assumption. According to evolutionary science, species membership is not defined in terms of essential and immutable traits or features.

Evolutionary history is a history of gradual changes in the population of particular organisms. If we accept this, there is no principled way to say where one species ends and another begins. Philosophers Paul Griffiths and Kim Sterelny write:

> There is no such thing as the “genetic essence” of a species. A central aspect of modern evolutionary biology is *population thinking*. . . . Each population is a collection of individuals with many genetic differences, and these differences are handed on to future generations in new combinations. . . .

Contemporary views on species are close to a consensus in thinking that species are identified by their histories. According to these views, Charles Darwin was a human being not by virtue of having field marks—rationality and an odd distribution of body hair—described (in Alpha Centaurese) in *A
Guide to the Primates of Sol, but in view of his membership in a population with a specific evolutionary history.  

It follows from this that, if Darwinism is the correct way to understand species, there were no first *Homo sapiens*, and thus biology gives us no set of features or traits that constitute essential human nature.

There are a number of ways to meet the anti-essentialism of Darwinian thinking. One is to admit that, given naturalism, the argument does indeed hold, but then to contend that this should not cause too much worry for theists because they are not naturalists. For naturalists, the guide for thinking about species-essences is first and foremost evolutionary biology. For Christian theists, however, the essential features of humans need not be entirely derived from a naturalistic point of view. Even if there were no naturalistically identifiable essence to *Homo sapiens*, theologians have more resources at their disposal. I see no reason why STIG need entail that “human being” in the theological sense must be identical to the biological category “*Homo sapiens*” or why the essential features of “human beings” would have to be scientifically transparent. In this sense, essential features could involve something like having a human soul or a God-given purpose and a goal to be with God in the *eschaton*.  

This move would, however, have some practical consequences. One is that we would not have a clearly delineated set of ________________________________


biological and psychological features to point to in order to discern who counts as a human and who does not. This could have serious ethical consequences. We have made serious mistakes in the past regarding who might qualify as fully human (e.g., slaves were considered subhuman); so, given that there are no unambiguous empirical criteria (most cases would be easy but there would be borderline cases), we should aim to be as inclusive as possible.

Another way is to face the argument head-on, keep the categories of “human beings” and “Homo sapiens” coextensive but maintain that there are indeed features of Homo sapiens that could be considered essential or semi-essential in some meaningful sense of the word. Mikael Stenmark, for instance, argues that once we give up the idea that essential features must be present universally across space and time, we can identify some essential features of Homo sapiens:

It seems as if human beings do have a species nature. The properties of our species nature include, at least, being animals with a bipedal walk, an erect posture, and a large brain, who are able to produce fertile offspring only with other humans, and who are toolmakers capable of rational and moral thinking, linguistic and artistic expression. . . . We do possess a transhistorical core of being.29

Stenmark is not alone in this insistence: there is an interesting debate about human nature and natural kinds going on in the philosophy of biology as well. Although most participants want to

avoid strong essentialist notions of human nature, there are a number of convincing accounts that appeal to human nature even under Darwinian assumptions.30

**Animal Souls and the Pervasiveness of Mentality**

As I pointed out above, mentality—that is, basic intellectual capacities for language, thinking, perceiving, emotion and sociality—is not a uniquely human phenomenon. All nonhuman animals exhibit various levels of mentality. There are great differences between, say, molluscs and the great apes, but it nevertheless seems that cognition goes far beyond the *Homo* lineage. But this raises the question: If it is indeed the case that mentality is associated with personhood (as STIG implies) and that mentality in its basic forms is not a *Homo sapiens* phenomenon (as the evidence suggests), will this not destroy the uniqueness of the God-human relationship? Recall that on STIG the imaging relationship between God and humans is supposed to be unique. If the imaging relationship is grounded in mentality, and if mentality is everywhere, then these facts seem to suggest that souls are everywhere in the animal kingdom too. And if the soul is the seat of the *imago Dei*, then it might appear that nonhuman animals become images of God as well.

From the point of view of emergent dualism and compound dualism, there is no problem in attributing souls to nonhuman animals. Indeed, many explicitly acknowledge the existence of different kinds of souls—human souls and animal souls. Even dualists like Swinburne think that animals have souls to the extent they possess mental life. Given the fact that we share many of


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our cognitive capacities and brain structures with nonhuman animals, it seems reasonable for the dualist to assume that nonhuman animals also have a mental life somewhat similar to humans’, which would entail that nonhuman animals have souls as well. Animal souls might come in many varieties and differ from human souls, but they would still be souls, nonphysical mental substances that anchor certain mental properties.\(^{31}\)

Given the possibility of nonhuman animal souls, the defender of STIG should be more specific and say that being the image of God is not identical with just having a soul of any kind; instead, being in the image of God would be to have a specifically human soul. One way to solve the problem is to modify STIG and admit that since cognitive uniqueness is on a spectrum instead of clear-cut, some nonhuman animals that are relatively similar to humans could participate in the imaging relationship with God in a similar way as humans. There might be some scriptural, ethical, and theological reasons to accept this view.\(^{32}\) In this modified STIG, there would be no clear-cut divide between reflecting God and not reflecting God, but being the image of God would be a gradual matter. Humans would indeed reflect God by having certain mental capacities to a higher degree than other species, but this is not necessarily so and could change over time. The image of God is as much about being as it is about becoming. Consequently, if some other species were to develop similar capacities to humans, they would, at

\[^{31}\text{Richard Swinburne,}\ \textit{The Evolution of the Soul,}\ 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997),\ \text{chap. 10.}\]

\[^{32}\text{See Celia Deane-Drummond,}\ \textit{The Wisdom of the Liminal: Evolution and Other Animals in Human Becoming} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).\]
least to some extent, develop human-like souls (i.e., personhood) and be images of God as well.33

Although I am rather sympathetic to this move myself, there might be ways in which one could preserve the commitment to the uniqueness of the God-human relationship as reflected in the *imago Dei*. One could, for instance, emphasize that in STIG the image of God is not simply identical to having some measure of mental life (which we now know many species have) but is instead to have the intellectual, moral, and social capacity for religious thinking and behavior—that is, to use theologian Robert Jenson’s terminology, to be able to be addressed by God and to respond to him.34 At least according to current science, the capacity for religion is rooted in uniquely human cognitive capacities, and thus no other living species shows anything like religion.35

**Conclusion**

What I have tried to suggest in this chapter is that a properly modified version of STIG can withstand the central challenges arising from the evolutionary account of humans. I began by

33 See chapter 7 below by Ted Peters.


outlining STIG and its commitment to human uniqueness and dualism and suggested that STIG is just as capable of responding to the challenges of evolution as other interpretations of the image of God, such as the functional and relational theories. I then looked at how the two central commitments of STIG come under fire from the evolutionary study of humans and argued that contemporary forms of dualism are not proven false or superfluous by evolutionary approaches to the mind. Furthermore, I argued that some form of human uniqueness could indeed be maintained even if standard accounts of the evolution of *Homo sapiens* turn out to be true. So it seems to me that STIG is compatible with an evolutionary view of humans and thus presents a viable way of understanding the image of God today.