

The idea of imago dei philosophy essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The idea of Imago Dei is covered in the Scriptures but it remains perplexing due to the fact that the definition is rather vague in nature. To be more precise, it is written that we are made in the image of God in Genesis 1: 26-31, we are in his image and his greatest creation. While the idea that we, humans, were created by God in his image is there, it's rather uncertain as to how exactly we were made in his image and this is where people tend to have different views. The importance of the subject is quite obvious, how exactly are we related in image with God is something that has a lot to do with understanding ourselves. Some might argue that we have no place in figuring a topic of such magnitude out nor do we have the mental capacity sophisticated enough to solve the question of how exactly are we made in the image of God. Perhaps, but many, myself included, believe that while we may not have the knowledge to find an answer to something of such enormity easily, we can certainly attempt to make reasonable conclusions and/or views on the subject. The idea of Imago Dei, or Image of God, sparked interest in me because the three views, that attempt to define it, all seem to have fairly solid points yet all of them have moments where one can object. It's quite intricate, yet simple, and fragile, yet precious to us, humans. The topic is so loosely brought up in the Bible yet so important to the understanding of ourselves that it becomes a puzzle that may seem unjust to many. If I were to choose, I would lean more towards the mimetic view as it seems to have, in my opinion, a broader specter of possible interpretations.

There are three generally accepted views on how exactly we may be related to God in image and all three of them are open to personal interpretation. The views are called functional, relational and mimetic. The functional view

assumes that we are in God's image because we were given the commandment by him to subdue the earth that we dwell in. The relational view suggests that we share the image with God in our relationship with him. The mimetic, or substantive, view is about the idea that we, humans, share the same features, characteristics and/or traits with God. Last but not least, there are those who believe in a synthesis of two or more views.[1] If both humans and animals are created by God, yet the former bear his image and the latter do not, perhaps the imago consists in some particular feature of a human not found in any animal. The only question is: what feature or features exactly?

I believe that my clinging to the Substantive view is explainable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is considered that the first humans created demonstrated original righteousness. God shared his soul's moral dispositions with us, not his intellect or immortality.[2] Original righteousness implies that his first creation possessed untainted spirits due to being united with their essence. This assumes that the creation of God shares certain characteristics that are similar to his and provide the creation a state of without sin. Indeed, in Genesis, the first man is portrayed as someone who does not experience negative traits, such as a predisposition to gluttony or greed. Later though, after the process of the first sin, man gained a more two-sided view on existence and the option that he has in his predisposal. [3] Augustine wrestled the idea, reckoning that we lost our image through human sin but then began to think that the mind of a human is indestructible and that it is possible to return the mind to form, so to speak. He also attempts to explain that the mind is merely distorted through sin. Also,

Augustine writes how the divine Trinity model is resembled in the mental faculties of a human. The three mental faculties are memory, intellect and will. This makes my stand more concrete in that we possess some, and possessed all of them in the beginning, of the moral capabilities that God had. Alas, the understanding of these possessions became twisted. In other words, the introduction of sin into humanity resulted in our initial moral qualities to become distorted, making it rather hard to identify what exactly made us in the likeness of God morally.[4] Calvin's commentary also notes that the Divine image is in man's mind and heart, a connection with reason, having all senses regulated and being generally good. Once again, it is mentioned that the image remains in us yet it is corroded by sin. In his commentary, he also mentions the Apostle Paul's words that we restore the image through the gospel and that spiritual regeneration is, in fact, the bringing back of that image that was maimed by sin. The gospel acts as a demonstration of the views that a firm Christian believer must possess rather than the body structure one should have. Surely, such emphasis on moral qualities acts as evidence towards the dominance of the substantive view.

There are, obviously, people that questioned such views on the Imago Dei. Martin Luther argues that Augustine's Trinitarian approach is flawed and assumed that the image has been lost through sin and can be repaired but will not be made perfect in this life. The fact that there cannot be a sinful side and a side that shares the qualities of God cannot be because the latter is lost with the introduction of the former. The problem with this argument is that there is no support in the Hebrew text. It is also written that Karl Barth, one that stressed the importance of the relational model, believed that man

is God's image of being human. This means that man can be completely different from God or can have but a few common traits. What this view interprets is the relationship that man has with God through encounters of dialogue.[5] Martin Luther also said that there is a special relation to God that Adam had but lost due to the original sin and it was then restored by Christ. This leads to a number of questions such as why would God bother with man to the extent that he does if people are just an imitation or even substantially different from God, what right does man have to the benefit of having such a relationship with God and why have there then no longer been any open forms of conversations in quite some time? In my opinion, the substantive view has an upper hand over the relational status in that the latter view just seems rather less important, for lack of better words. Indeed, man has had dialogue with God in Genesis and there is the possibility of male-female relationships but it seems to end there. There is also the functional view that assumes man as the representative of God, created in order to rule over earth. This view, I believe, assumes the more physical likeness that man is supposed to have with God. Yet, this leads to the assumption that if a man, for example, is paralyzed and cannot get out of his bed then that means he loses his resemblance with God. The substantive view, on the other hand, takes on a view that touches the inner processes of a person. A man, despite being unable to move, is still in the image of God in his characteristics and views.[6] The dynamic view is quite sophisticated, despite it seeming rather ambitious and attempting to bite off more than it can chew. Grounded in Greek antiquity, the view began with the interpretation of Hebrew text Platonic idea. This resulted in the idea of assimilation to God, stressing the idea that man must strive to minimize the

<https://assignbuster.com/the-idea-of-imago-dei-philosophy-essay/>

difference between him and God as much as possible by means of ethical striving. The idea was then borrowed by the Renaissance humanism, where they believed that the idea behind Imago Dei is our ability of striving for development. For example, Pico della Mirandola, in his work *De hominis dignitate*, wrote that humans were created without a decided form and that the main idea behind the image of God was the shaping of our nature by ourselves. This statement assumes the idea that man has, basically, all of the aspects that the three views mention and that we are our only limitation in achieving the Imago Dei.[7]Anthony Hoekema, in *Created in God's image*, stated the following:

“ Must we think of the image of God in man as involving only what man is and not what he does, or only what he does and not what he is, or both what he is and what he does? Is ‘ image of God’ only a description of the way in which the human being functions, or is it also a description of the kind of being he or she is?”

He continued by stressing that our abilities, such as being able to reason, give us the tools to live and to sufficiently serve our roles as those who relate to and represent God.[8]Lastly, in Thessalonians 5: 23, the image of man is supposedly a tri-unity, as in spirit, soul and body. While this seems like a “ everyone is happy” type of view at first, it also raises a lot of questions. Indeed, the idea that we are able to minimize the difference between us and God is quite tempting but it seems rather obscure because, in my opinion, it gives us too much control over our own destiny. There's no sort of plan other than us attempting our best to become to as close to the Image of God as possible through self-development. Also, we still do not know what traits we

need to achieve in order to achieve the image of God. In fact, it only adds question if a person who believed in, for example, the functional view decides to start following the dynamic view as the former is much broader in nature. Furthermore, it does not cover why have we been chosen to be the ones who are given the ability to develop our closeness to God.

In conclusion, I believe that every human is entitled to their own view on the Imago Dei. Despite many fascinating and logical elaborations on the subject, such as Augustine's and Martin Luther's views, all of them have different interpretations and I think that even they would change their views if they were presented with a more, in their opinion, logical explanation. The thing is that the information regarding the Imago Dei is quite scarce, to say the least. From my experience with the subject, the more a person thinks about the Imago Dei, the more fathomless the whole concept becomes. That is why I firmly believe that a person should choose the view that they see as most fitting, regardless of what others may say as there are very diverging views on the subject. One should not be seen as a fool by another for choosing a view that may differ from his or hers as we are given little to make a concrete decision on the topic. I chose the substantive approach as it seems the most fitting to me and Augustine's ideas certainly helped me be more confident regarding my decision. We possess the characteristics yet we do not know what they are exactly as they have been mixed and distorted by sin. If it weren't for the original sin than we would have a more firm understanding on what the characteristics that we share with God really are. Nonetheless, I do not assume that my view is the correct view that everyone should agree upon nor is it wrong.