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Suorum Operum Potestas: Works, Virtues, and the Theology of Economy

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Abstract

In the prologue to I-II of the Summa Theologica, Thomas Aquinas says that part of the image of God in human beings is that the human person liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem - "has free will" (liberum arbitrium habens) and what is often translated as "control of their actions" (suorum operum potestatem). This article makes the case for translating "suorum operum potestatem" as "power over their works," giving this passage a distinctly political and economic significance. It contends that Thomas is assigning human beings precisely what critics of capitalism claim that industrial society denies them. The "works" that people do in homes, offices, factories, farms, and hospitals - the things that they get paid (or don't get paid) a wage for - ought to be their very own, because they are a means by which people can grow in virtue. Translating "suorum operum potestas" in this way puts Thomas in conversation not only with modern anti-capitalist leftists like Karl Mark, but also with Russian Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov, who envisioned work as a form of priestly activity that "humanized" creation by rendering it to God.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, Karl Marx, Sergei Bulgakov, Economy, Work

> *Quia, sicut Damascenus dicit, homo factus ad imaginum Dei dicitur, secundum quod per imaginem significatur intellectuale et arbitrio liberum et per se potestavitum; postquam praedictum est de examplari, scilicet de Deo, et de his quae processerunt ex divina potestate secundum eius voluntatem; restat ut consideremus de eius imagine, idest de homine secundum quod et ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem.*
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> -Thomas Aquinas, Prologue to I-II of the *Summa Theologica*

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These words appear at a crucial point in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. The "angelic doctor" has finished, he says, describing God and his will, and is prepared to begin discussing the image of God, human beings. It is important to note from the outset that Thomas has not described God in abstract philosophical terms. For example, in Question 2 of Part I of the *Summa*, while Thomas argues that it is not the case it is the case that God's existence is self-evident (ST I.2.1), he posits that God's existence can be demonstrated because "the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Romans 1:20, cited in ST 1.2.2). This, Thomas takes to mean that "the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us" (*ibid*). As both Gene Rogers and Fergus Kerr are at pains to remind Thomas' modern-day readers, this does not mean that there is any knowledge of God that is available apart from God's gracious self-disclosure to creation (that is precisely what Thomas has denied in I.2.1).[1] Rather, what Thomas is arguing here, much like modern, neo-orthodox theologians like Karl Barth, is that there is no knowledge of God *in se* apart from the knowledge of God *ad extra*. Creatures do not know God in any way save as the God who has chosen to be *for us*. It is not the job of theology - indeed it is a fool's errand if there ever was one - to try to talk about God in general, God in the abstract, God as such, under some philosophical schema like form, idea, reason, or the concrete universal. Christian Theology cannot begin with any of these things, but must rather begin with the "effects" of God, God's actions, of which we are the recipients.

So, Thomas has begun the *Summa Theologica*, he reminds his readers in this transitional passage, by talking about the things that proceeded from God's power, by God's will. In other words, he has talked about the way God moves - as "first mover" in creation, for example (ST I.2.3). Now, in I-II of the *Summa*, he will proceed from theology to anthropology, from talking about the way that God moves to the way that human beings, who are made in God's image, are moved by God. The word with which Thomas links these things is *power*. He has talked about things that proceed *ex divina potestate*; now he will talk about the human *potestatem*, which images God's. God's power is the source of the created effects by which creatures can know God. It is the exercise of *divina potestas* for God to act for creatures in such a way that they can clearly see the invisible things of God in the things that God has made. The image of God is something *analogous* in human beings - some common ground that God has given to human beings in which to stand with God. What

[1] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2002), 60.

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is that analogy? It is that the human being *liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem* - "has free will" (*liberum arbitrium habens*) and what is often translated as "control of their actions" (*suorum operum potestatem*).

At a surface level, "free will and control of their actions" appears to be a bad translation. Thomas doesn't use the latin word *actus*, which denotes action elsewhere in the *Summa Theologica*, but rather *opera*, the plural of *opus*, which might better be translated not as "actions" but as "works." Moreover, the word *potestatem*, especially when paired with the earlier phrase *ex divina potestate*, a parallelism that Thomas clearly intends given that he's talking about God and God's image, is better translated not as "control" but as "power." So the phrase *suorum operum potestatem* is better rendered into English as "power over their works." This phrase might well fire the imagination of anyone versed in contemporary left wing or anti-capitalist politics, since people's power (or lack of power) over the work that they do - and the means by which they do it, and the value of what they produce with it - is one of the main questions that left wing activists have raised concerning capitalist modes of production since at least Marx. Indeed, this paper will argue not only that the translation "power over their works" is superior to "control over their actions," but that it makes some sense within Thomas' broader corpus to read him as talking about the actual work that human beings do, and that the idea that the image of God consists in human beings having power over their works is an extremely generative one when put in conversation with the critiques raised by modern anti-capitalist politics. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full-fledged egalitarian, propertyless, stateless and classless vision of life together in creation, this, and no less than this, is what this theological idea opens out on, and invites further theological speculation.

The paper will make this argument in the following way. First, it will briefly review some of the arguments for translating "opera" as "works" in something like the sense that Marxists, anarchists, and other modern anti-capitalists use the word. Then it will offer a summary of Marx's labor theory of value and alienation to demonstrate the points at which Thomas' proposal that human beings have "power over their works" intersects with contemporary radical politics. After that, the paper will explore why, in Thomas' theology, human beings need not just acts, but concrete, material works, and what having power over them might do. This will have to do both with Thomas' "noncompetitive"[2] account of divine and human agency and

[2] The term "noncompetitive account" of divine and human agency, comes from Kathryn Tanner.See *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1988).

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his understanding of what it means for human beings to behold the beatific vision. To draw this out, the paper will then put Thomas in conversation with the twentieth century Russian Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov. The reflections on Bulgakov will allow the paper to close by offering a few reflections on what the broader social vision is implied by the statement that human beings have "power over their works," and how that vision overlaps with and differs from conventional Marxism.

Does the Translation Stand Up?

The first thing that we need to ask is whether or not the translation of "opera" as "works" in the modern sense of the term actually stands up under scrutiny. That it shouldn't be translated "actions" is plain enough, since Thomas has a different word, *actus*, which he uses for that. But "works" can have a wide range of meanings aside from the modern one. The term need not imply building houses and planting vineyards, pouring concrete and filling out paperwork, teaching classes and cleaning houses, caring for children, the sick, and the elderly - in short, the specific acts that, when they are all lumped together, are named "labor."

Of course, later readers of Thomas, both among his protestant discontents and catholic defenders, will have quite a lot to say about "works" under another definition. "Works" in the theological debates of the reformation, connotes things that human beings do to accrue merit with God and assure their salvation. For example, Article XX of the Augsburg confession includes the line *Olim vexabantur conscientiae doctrina operum, non audiebant ex Evangelio consolationem* - formerly [people's] consciences were vexed with the doctrine of works; they did not hear any comfort out of the Gospel.[3] The paragraph goes on to list desert asceticism, the monastic life, and other works that human beings "devised" in order "to merit grace." *Opera*, in this protestant sense (which had everything to do with how Luther and his contemporaries read Thomas Aquinas!) means something manufactured, something not quite real, that human beings invent for themselves to do on the assumption that it will please God. A great chasm of meaning separates the *works* that do or do not save according to differing sides of reformation debates and the works that human beings actually do in their day to day lives. Clearly, in Thomas, *operum* have a great deal to do with human salvation, since they are part of the image of God. But does that mean that, in the

[3] Schaff, Philip, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* vol III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker,1983), 21.

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Summa Theologica, *opera* aren't also the things that human beings do in a home, a factory, a mine, a field, or an office?

There are a number good pieces of evidence to suggest that Thomas would not have been working with such a divide. The biggest, perhaps, comes from the Latin Vulgate, which would have been Thomas' primary liturgical text, and which clearly uses *opus* and variations on it to talk about work in the economic sense of the term. For example, Exodus 20:8-11, the fifth commandment, uses *opus* to refer to the work that people are not to do on the sabbath: *sex diebus operaberis et facies omnia opera tua* (six days you will work and make all your works) and *septimo autem die sabbati Domini Dei tui non facies omne opus tu et filius tuus et filia tua servus tuus et ancilla tua iumentum tuum et advena qui est intra portas tuas* (the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you will not do any work, neither you nor your son nor your daughter, nor your male slave nor your female slave nor your animal nor the alien within your gates). When God pronounces the judgment against Adam for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Genesis 3:17 quotes God as saying *maledicta terra in opere tuo in laboribus comedes eam cunctis diebus vitae tuae* (cursed is the ground in your work; in toiling labor you will eat of it all the days of your life). In describing the way that Pharaoh afflicted the Israelites in Egypt, Exodus 1:11 reads *praeposuit itaque eis magistros operum ut adfligerent eos oneribus aedificaveruntque urbes tabernaculorum Pharaoni Phiton et Ramesses* (therefore he set over them masters of works to lay burdens on them, and they built for Pharaoh tabernacle cities, Phiton and Ramesses). Exodus 2:23 continues the story, saying *post multum temporis mortuus est rex Aegypti et ingemescentes filii Israhel propter opera vociferati sunt ascenditque clamor eorum ad Deum ab operibus* (after a long time the king of Egypt died and the children of Israel, groaning, cried out because of their works and the clamor went up to God because of their workings). Ruth 2:19, quoting Naomi asking Ruth about her first meeting with Boaz, reads *dixitque ei socrus ubi hodie collegisti et ubi fecisti opus sit benedictus qui misertus est tui indicavitque ei apud quem esset operata et nomen dixit viri quod Booz vocaretur* (her mother said to her where did you glean today and where did you work blessed is he who had pity on you; she told her with whom she had worked: and she told the man's name and his name was Boaz).[4]

The Vulgate also uses *opus* and *operum* to designate physical works that God does. For example, the opening of Psalm 18 reads *caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opus manus eius adnuntiat firmamentum* (the heavens declare the glory of God and all the firmament shows

[4] Thomas Aquinas cites Ruth three times in the *Summa Theologica*: I-II.105.3 co., I-II.105.4 ad. 6, and III.81.1 co.

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the works of his hands). Genesis 2:2-3 reads *conplevitque Deus die septimo opus suum quod fecerat et requievit die septimo ab universo opere quod patrarat et benedixit diei septimo et sanctificavit illum quia in ipso cessaverat ab omni opere suo quod creavit Deus ut faceret* (God ended the work which he made and God rested on the seventh day from all the work which God had done and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it God from all God's work which God had made).

The Vulgate translation of the New Testament, too, uses *opus* and *opera* in this way. Matthew 10:10, from Jesus' instructions to the disciples, for example, reads *non peram in via neque duas tunicas neque calciamenta neque virgam dignus enim est operarius cibo suo* (don't take money or two tunics or shoes or a staff for your journey, for the workman is worthy of his wages). In the parable of the man with two sons, Matthew 21:28 says *et accedens ad primum dixit fili vade hodie operare in vinea mea* (and he said to the first son "go and work in my vineyard"). Paul, describing his "tentmaking" ministry, says in 1 Corinthians 4:12, *et laboramus operantes manibus* (and we labor, working with our hands) and the deuteropaulinist, in Ephesians 4:28, instructs his hearers *qui furabatur iam non furetur magis autem laboret operando manibus quod bonum est ut habeat unde tribuat necessitatem patienti* (him that stole, let him steal no more; rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have something to give to the one who suffers need), using the same phrase.

A special case that is worth pointing out is Isaiah 26:12, which reads *Domine dabis pacem nobis omnia enim opera nostra operatus es nobis* (Lord you will give us peace for you have worked all our works in us). This text, Fergus Kerr points out, is one of Thomas' favorites.[5] Indeed, for Thomas, Kerr explains, this text is a key proof of the noncompetitive relation that exists between divine and human agency, a theme to which this paper will return to and develop more fully below. Kerr writes that Thomas understands this text to mean

> that 'God is in every thing, not indeed as part of its nature or as a property, but as the agent is present in what he does' (ST 1.8.1). 'God is above all things by the transcendence of his nature and yet is in all things as causing their being' (1.8.1.1). God is in everything 'inwardly' (*intime*). Indeed, God is in things 'containing them'; we might even say that 'things are more in God than God is in things' (1.8.1.2 and 3.3). Moreover, God is in things 'as giving them being, power and activity' (1.8.2). Thomas sees no conflict between God's working in everything and every being's doing its own thing, so to speak. Or rather: he is well aware of the temptations, common in his day as in ours, to see rivalry between God's sovereign freedom and

[5] Kerr, 43.

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> human autonomy, either making God an item in the world or reducing creatures to puppets.[6]

This paper will return to noncompetitive agency, and, specifically, why it might be important to Thomas, and to us, that it applies to work in the material, economic sense, below. For now it is important to note that Thomas' key biblical text for this most important of his theological insights uses the term *opus* both for what God does and for what human beings do when empowered by God. God *works* human *works* in us and in this sense is the "cause" of our agency.

In context, this key text is clearly talking, among other things, about physical, material "works" that human beings do. The passage is both a song of lament, about the state of exiled Israel, and a song of victory, that envisions that "the poor and the needy" (Isaiah 26:6) will trample on their oppressors. As one contemporary commentator puts it, "In view is the small, vulnerable, post-exilic community that had many opportunities and many reasons to give up on [Ha-Shem] but did not. Because they continued to trust [Ha-Shem] in hard times, the Israelites will be the ones most exuberant in the victory parade."[7] The "hard times" in question are irreducibly economic, such that "the poem invites adherence of all other waiting and hoping and diminished people, those who live for a time when the lofty are lowered and trampled - they and their urban emblems of smugness and indifference."[8] It is in the context of describing this victory parade, in which the exiles of Israel are allowed to return and the poor and needy trample on the rich and the powerful that, speaking for those victorious poor, the prophet writes, "Lord you will give us peace for you have worked all our works in us."

Of course, there are plenty of "social justice passages" in scripture that contemporary Christians regard as helpful because of their economic themes. But should one read Thomas as having assigned this significance to the text? Two major pieces of evidence speak in favor of this reading. The first is from a key source text for the *Summa Theologica*, namely, Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine stresses the peace to which Isaiah 26:12 refers. It is, he says

> the peace of quietness, the peace of the sabbath, a peace with no evening (2 Thess 3:16). This entire most beautiful order of very good things will complete its course and then passes away, for at creation there was both morning and evening. The seventh day has no evening and has no ending. You sanctified it to abide everlastingly. After your very good works which you made while remaining yourself in repose,

[6] *Ibid*, 43-44.

[7] Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 202.

[8] *Ibid*, 203.

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> you *rested the seventh day* (Gen 1:31, 2:1-3). This utterance in your book foretells for us that after our works which, because they are your gifts to us, are *very good*, we also may rest in you for the sabbath of eternal life. There also you will rest in us, just as now you work in us. Your rest will be through us, just as now your works are done through us. But you, Lord, are always working and always at rest. Your seeing is not in time, your movement is not in time, and your rest is not in time. Yet your acting causes us to see things in time, time itself, and the repose which is outside time.[9]

For Augustine, the peace which the prophet is confident that the Lord will give is the peace of eternal life, which is the peace of the sabbath, which comes after the completion of human *works*. Human working, Augustine argues, is God's working in creatures, and human resting, at the sabbath and in the life of the age to come, is, similarly, God's own repose. The human pattern of work and rest, between which human beings must alternate, before finally coming to rest without end, comes from the way that humans participate in God's work and rest in time. God works and rests simultaneously. Human beings work six days and rest on the seventh, and work in this life and rest in the life to come, because they are temporal and finite creatures, bounded in time and space.

The second piece of evidence is Thomas' own commentary on Isaiah. Like Cyril of Alexandria and many other patristic and medieval commentators, Thomas does read this text as a type for the coming of Jesus Christ. But he also stresses the literal reading of the text as *einim pradicit justorum fiduciam* (a prediction with righteous confidence) about a day *post reditum de captivitate, et afflictionem Moabitarum* (after the captivity and affliction by the Moabites). In either sense, however, Thomas holds that the portrayal of the victory parade through the open gates of Zion *ponit justitiae fructum, scilicet pacem* (presents the fruit of justice, namely peace). He goes on to say that justice is the promise of peace, the way to peace, and the announcement of peace. Tellingly, unlike Augustine, Thomas does not comment on this chapter verse by verse, as he does many other chapters of Isaiah. Rather, he comments on the chapter as a whole, arguing that the connection between justice and peace is a general theme that runs throughout.

Neither Augustine, in commenting on Isaiah 26:12 specifically, nor Thomas, in commenting on the chapter as a whole, specifies that the *opera*, the "works" that the prophet says God "works in us" are, specifically, the kind of value-producing labor that contemporary working class people do in exchange for wages as opposed to the

[9] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 13:35.50-52 trans H. Chadwick, cited in Robert L. Wilken, *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 227.

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manufactured hoops that protestant polemicists say that human beings invent for themselves to jump through when they do not know the gospel of free grace, which catholic apologists might then have to defend when debating with them. If we are faced with a dichotomy between works in an "economic" sense and works in a "spiritual" sense, then we are out of luck if we turn to Augustine or Thomas to help us decide which of these senses the word *opera* has in Isaiah 26:12 - and that is precisely the point. In their comments on this verse (and, I would strongly suggest, in general), *they do not make this distinction* - and that suggests that neither should we in interpreting Thomas' use of *opera* in the *Summa Theologica*. There is ample evidence, as we have seen, that the vulgate sees farming, herding, tent making, and all other forms of what modern people would call "labor" as *opera*, and there is no good reason to bracket these activities in our mind when we read the word on the pages of Thomas' writing.

Before moving on from these translation issues, however, there is one, final piece of evidence to consider. The entry on *opus* in J.F. Niermeyer's *Sherter Lexicon of Medieval Latin* defines the term as "labor" or "service," and, in rendering the term into French, specifically equates it with *corvee* or forced labor. *Opus castelli*, for example, was corvee labor for building and repairing castles. Opus could specifically mean construction or building. These definitions appear before the works of Christ or God, or the equation of *opera* with healing, miracles, or works of charity and alms to the poor.[10] In short, like Thomas and Augustine, Niermeyer recognizes no inherent distinction in medieval Latin between work in the "economic" and "spiritual" senses that might exclude things like castle maintenance or construction work from the meaning of *opera* in the prologue to I-II of the *Summa Theologica*.

Thomas Aquinas Meets Karl Marx

There is, then, a good case to be made that, even if Thomas should not be read as talking specifically about labor in the modern, economic sense, that sense should not be excluded from the scope of his argument when he says that what it means for human beings to be made in the image of God is for them to have *suorum operum potestatem*, "power over their works." Among other things, human beings have (or ought to have) power over the things they do in factories and fields, schools and offices, homes and prisons. Whatever significance this idea may have had in the thirteenth century, it is

[10] J.F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), s.v. "opus."

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an extremely radical proposition in the twenty first, and it is to this modern significance that this paper now turns.

In his *Thomas Aquinas and the Supreme Court*, Gene Rogers imagines a series of conversations that Thomas might have, in the communion of saints that transcends time and place, with such contemporary figures as John Finnis, Karl Barth, and Judith Butler.

> Imagine that by a special revelation Thomas Aquinas is rapt up into the present day for just a moment to read John Finnis's tour de force, *Aquinas*, especially the chapter on "Basic Goods." By the question *de raptu* (II-II.175), there is both no problem of language, and no possibility (without language) of remembering the encounter well enough to have left anything detailed about it in writing. Without having a chance to reread anything, check footnotes carefully, or acquire a detailed acquaintance with Finnis's other work, what would be Aquinas's first impressions? The point of this thought-experiment, then, is not to be fair to Finnis, but to paint in chiaroscuro the contrast between a pre-Cartesian Aquinas and a post-Cartesian one.[11]

There are at least two good things about Rogers' way of setting up these conversations. First, it is a way of avoiding a detailed genealogical account of the way that Thomas Aquinas, in the form of his corpus, actually encounters a Finnis or a Barth on the historical stage, and to paint his system of thought side-by-side with theirs, placing them in direct conversation. Second, there is something deeply faithful about this way of putting thinkers in conversation with one another, which assumes that the communion of saints really does transcend the contingencies of historical development, and that, across continents and centuries, these people really can talk to one another, because the ground of their conversation is One who transcends time and eternity Himself.

Borrowing Rogers' method, it is possible to imagine a similar conversation between Aquinas and Karl Marx. If the angelic doctor and the father of modern communism met in heaven (we can assume, with Howard Zinn, that Marx is, in fact, in heaven, and busy agitating with other revolutionary intellectuals[12]), would they be able to productively talk about human beings having power over their works? It

[11] Gene Rogers, *Aquinas and the Supreme Court: Race, Gender, and the Failure of Natural Law in Thomas's Biblical Commentaries* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 64.

[12] For an excellent account of this, see Zinn's play, *Marx in Soho*, in which Marx has successfully organized the great intellectuals, including Socrates, Buddha, and Jesus, to successfully petition God to allow him to return to earth for a day to clarify his positions, and the continuing relevance of his thought, for a modern, supposedly post-communist audience.The only problem is that there is a mistake in transit, and Marx ends up not in Soho, London, but Soho, New York, where he expounds, for an American audience, his thoughts on wage labor and the Paris commune, his fights with Mikhail Bakunin and the anarchists, and his marital and family problems.

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should go without saying that Thomas would be dismayed by Marx's atheism, though not necessarily his critique of religion, and he would find it exceedingly strange that one committed to history actually having a definite shape would also, simultaneously, assume, without necessarily stating outright, a basically nominalist metaphysics. But Thomas might find two of Marx's theoretical tropes quite helpful for talking about what it means for human beings to have (or not have) power over their works - his theory of surplus value and his theory of alienation. Marx's theory of surplus value helps to explain how and why human beings lose power over their works; his theory of alienation helps explain why it is not only dangerous, but actively dehumanizing, for this to happen.

In his 1847 pamphlet *Wage Labor and Capital*, edited and translated by Engels in 1891, Marx lays out his understanding of the relationship between those who work (the proletariat) and those who own the means of production (the capitalist class). Because, in this passage, Marx explains both surplus value and alienation in a concise, accessible way, I will quote him at length.

> What takes place in the exchange between the capitalist and the wage laborer?
> The laborer receives means of subsistence in exchange for his labor-power; the capitalist receives, in exchange for his means of subsistence, labor, the productive activity of the laborer, the creative force by which the worker not only replaces what he consumes, but also gives to the accumulated labor a greater value than it previously possessed. The laborer gets from the capitalist a portion of the existing means of subsistence. For what purpose do these means of subsistence serve him? For immediate consumption. But as soon as I consume means of subsistence, they are irrevocably lost to me, unless I employ the time during which those means sustain my life in producing new means of subsistence, in creating by my labor new values lost in consumption. But it is just this noble reproductive power that the laborer surrenders to the capitalist in exchange for means of subsistence received. Consequently, he has lost himself.
>
> Let us take an example. For one shilling a laborer works all day long in the fields of a farmer, to whom he thus secures a return of two shillings. The farmer not only receives the replaced value which he has given to the day laborer, he has doubled it. Therefore, he has consumed the one shilling that he gave to the day laborer in a fruitful, productive manner. For one shilling he has bought the labor power of the day laborer, which creates products of the soil twice the value, and out of one shilling makes two. The day laborer, on the contrary, receives in the place of his productive force, whose results he has just surrendered to the farmer, one shilling, which he exchanges for means of subsistence, which he consumes more or less quickly.

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This understanding of class is helpful, both for modern people and for Thomas, because it moves us away from thinking about class in terms of how much money is in your bank account and directs us, instead, to think about class in terms of *power/potestas*. Who has power/potestas over the work that the day-laborer does? The farmer. Why? Because he owns the farm. This is why he is able to pay the day-laborer only a part of the real value that he has produced. That part might be bigger or smaller depending on the circumstances (there might be a labor shortage, for example, or the day laborers might form a union and collectively bargain with the farmer; alternatively, the farmer might use incarcerated workers whom he can pay less than a dollar a day, or migrant farmworkers, or some other population whom the capitalist state, which is closely aligned with him, has rendered vulnerable for him; indeed, there will always be an imperative for the farmer to seek out something more like the latter situation than the former, and this back-and-forth is called class warfare) but the expropriation (that is, the theft) of some of the value that the day laborer produces by the farmer, which Marxists call "surplus value," is built into the system. There's no reason to employ a wage worker if you are not going to hold back some part of the value they produce as profit. Thus, to paraphrase Proudhon, profit is theft.[13] The only way to change this state of affairs is for the day laborers to unite together as a class, forcibly overthrow the farmer, and take and run the farm for themselves - that is, to *seize the means of production!* and abolish the class relation entirely. This, Marx might strenuously tell Thomas in their heavenly conversation, is the only way for modern workers to have power over their works.

But working people, Marx argues, lose more than their fair share of the value they produce in this setup. The laborer in Marx's parable, "has lost himself." In this telling phrase we see the other major idea that Thomas might find attractive, i.e. Marx's theory of alienation. Simply put, the power/potestas that the owners of the means of production have over members of the producing class does not just serve to immiserate, but also to dehumanize. Lacking power over their works, the industrial proletariat lack the ability to recoup the full value of their labor, and, so, they are always subject to poverty or, at least, to precarity in their standard of living. Unemployment, a workplace accident, injury, death, illness, or disability in the family, or simply old age - anything, in short, that disrupts the worker's ability to make it from paycheck to paycheck - can spell disaster, even for relatively well-paid (e.g. "professional" or "white collar") workers, and even more so for so-called "unskilled labor" and for groups

[13] Proudhon's original maxim is "property is theft!"See Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "Property is Theft" in Daniel Guerin, *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 48-54.

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of workers deliberately rendered vulnerable to bourgeois predation by state-sanctioned violence. Yet, in all this, Marx says, the worker loses something even more - and this is what his theory of alienation tries to name. In losing power over their works, workers, in some sense, lose their very selves. This is an idea that Thomas might find quite compelling, given that, in the prologue to I-II, he places "power over their works" at the center of his definition of what it means to be a human being according to the image of God.

The most basic form of alienation for Marx is intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production, which divides people into classes, one of which owns the means of production and another of which does the actual producing. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx writes that "the object which labor produces - labor's product - confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer." The same day laborer that the farmer employs will buy the food the farmer grows (the food *she* has grown) at a grocery store. It is something else, something "out there" in the social world. Marx goes on to explain why this is problematic: "The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material; it is the *objectification* of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification." In other words, when workers "confront" the products of their labor as commodities that are "out there" in the social world, they confront something of themselves that has been made strange to them. This, argues Marx, does real damage to the human person. "Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as a *loss of realization* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object and bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*."[14] These conditions were later expressed more poetically by the American lyricist Ralph Chaplin:

> It is we who ploughed the prairies; built the cities where they trade
> Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles of railroad laid
> Now we stand outcast and starving midst the wonders we have made;
> But the union makes us strong![15]

It is not just "starvation" that is the problem. Workers who have, with the products of their labor, fashioned not just individual items but a whole social world, now live in a world that is not their own, indeed, a world to which they can often seem superfluous. In losing "power over their works," working class people living under capitalism are

[14] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans Martin Mulligan, available online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm

[15] Ralph Chaplin, "Solidarity Forever" in The Industrial Workers of the World, *The Little Red Songbook: To Fan the Flames of Discontent* (Ypsilanti, MI: IWW General Headquarters,1995), 1.

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alienated from those works, from the act of working itself, which does not seem to produce anything meaningful, and, left isolated and seemingly superfluous in a world of their own making, are alienated from other workers and, finally, from their own human being. When Chaplin writes "the union makes us strong!" he does not simply mean that unions can lessen the chance that workers will starve - though they absolutely can and do do that. He also means that workers taking ownership, once again, of their own works, and, in an industrial setting, of the means of production by which their working takes place, is actually a *humanizing* process, one that restores integrity and wholeness to the person.

Why Do Human Beings Need *Suorum Operum Potestatem*?

All of this, Thomas might reply to Marx, is a very good account of what happens under capitalism when the bulk of human beings - the 99% - are denied *suorum operum potestatem*. It may even be a good prescription for how to solve the problem. But Marx's analysis, Thomas might note, is missing something absolutely crucial: a normative account of the human to explain why it is necessary for working people to have "power over their works" in the first place. Indeed, this sort of analysis is anathema to Marx. As he puts it in *The German Ideology*, describing his own, "materialist," methodology,

> In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-processes we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.[16]

Much could be said, and has been said, about Marx's general take on ideology and its relation to religion in general and Christian theology in particular. The notion that human beings don't just come up with

[16] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, trans Tim Delaney, Bob Schwartz, and Brian Baggins, available online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/.

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ideas but generate them by engaging, first, in "material processes" need not issue in any stronger a commitment to epistemological relativism than any other theory about how human beings think.[17] Moreover, claim that religious and moral ideas are, in some sense, provisional and historical, and always already reflect human finitude, is far from alien to Christian discourse, going at least as far back as Cappadocian arguments against the Eunomians,[18] and reflected in Thomas conviction that Sacred Doctrine is not a science, like arithmetic and geometry, that proceeds from the light of natural reason but from the "science of God and the blessed" (*ST* I.1.2). Only God and the blessed can speak about God's nature "objectively," the way living people might about mathematical principles. The rest of us have to muddle along contingenty and prudentially, in the light of principles derived from that "higher" knowledge.

What Thomas *would* object to, however, is that Marx has ruled out of court, before even beginning the conversation, any constructive definition of the human being as a creature made after the image of God. Thomas wants to insist that God has set up active human beings, with their "real life-processes" in a certain way. Of course, Thomas would remind Marx, claiming this doesn't mean abandoning Marx's good and right epistemological commitment to "men in the flesh" and imposing, instead, a definition of the human person as "narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived," since God doesn't establish "real life-processes" that way. Rather, God establishes human beings as a certain sort of created being by taking on human flesh in Jesus Christ. As Gene Rogers says, summarizing Thomas, perhaps more succinctly than he ever summarizes himself, "In natural law, God establishes the

[17] In fact, some of the strongest relativists in the modern academy, e.g. followers of Foucault and other postmodernists, explicitly or implicitly reject materialism as *too* "objectivist."

[18] See, in particular, both Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium*.Both Basil and Gregory precede Wittgenstein by almost a millenium and a half in presenting a theory of language as a historical, material structure within which human expression is always already caught up.For the Cappadocians, the "cash value" of this idea was to debunk Eunomius' contention that, because God is simple, God is therefore identical with the name of his nature, i.e. "unbegotten," which would preclude the Son, the Only Begotten, from sharing one nature with God the Father.The Cappadocians are very concerned to stress that no "language game" can descriptively capture God's essence.Rather, human *epinoia* or words/concepts (there are no pre-linguistic concepts for the Cappadocians) are always already reactions to God's *energia*.Each of these epinoia are finite and fragmentary, and so there is always a need to say more as human beings move further in and further up into the life of the Trinity by means of their growth in virtue, stemming from their desire for God, which Gregory masterfully articulates in *The Life of Moses*.The Cappadocians would have little problem with either Marx's claim that *epinoia* are materially produced (that's why they're so concerned with virtue) or that they occur provisionally, within history, and are therefore fragmentary and finite (that's why they think virtue is dynamic, not static, and why human life that mirrors the divine life by participating in it is "ever changing from glory to glory").

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craft of being human, which is to say the skill and wisdom by which the human being imitates God. That's one reason why God took on a body: to show us how it's done."[19] In Jesus Christ, God discloses God's own "real life-process" as the life-process human beings are to make their own by participating in it with their bodies. In Him, we see the structural image of God and the moral likeness to God clearly revealed in a human body and soul, in "man in the flesh." And Thomas tells us that what we see in the image of God is precisely what capitalist forms of production deny - that human beings have power over their works, even as the works of God proceed out of God's power in creation.

So, the next question that needs to be answered is, why, in Thomas' theological anthropology, is it important that human beings have power over their works? What does it do for them? Why might to be dehumanizing (*alienating*, to use Marx's term) to deny them this? In order to address these questions it is necessary, first, to look at a passage almost identical to the prologue to I-II of the *Summa Theologica*, namely *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.69.13-14, which reads as follows:

> Item. Contra rationem sapientiae est ut sit aliquid frustra in operibus sapientis. Si autem res creatae nullo modo operarentur ad effectus producendos, sed solus Deus operaretur omnia immediate, frustra essent adhibitae ab ipso aliae res ad producendos effectus. Repugnat igitur praedicta positio divinae sapientiae. Adhuc. Quod dat alicui aliquid principale, dat eidem omnia quae consequuntur ad illud: sicut causa quae dat corpori elementari gravitatem, dat ei motum deorsum. Facere autem aliquid actu consequitur ad hoc quod est esse actu, ut patet in Deo: ipse enim est actus purus, et est etiam prima causa essendi omnibus, ut supra ostensum est. Si igitur communicavit aliis similtudinem suam quantum ad esse, inquantum res in esse produxit, consequens est quod communicaverit eis similtudinem suam quantum ad agere, ut etiam res creatae habeant proprias actiones.

Here, Thomas is laying out what Tanner will later be call his "non-competitive account of divine and human agency," the same theological principle that is at work in the prologue to I-II of the *Summa Theologica*. Thomas, Kerr writes, summarizing this passage, "notes that there is nothing to stop us from thinking that the same effect is produced by a lower agent and by God - thus by both immediately - though in different ways. It is always by divine agency that the human agent produces his or her proper effect."[20] This is also what Thomas is getting at when he says, in the prologue to *ST* I-II, that human beings have *liberum arbitrium*, of which *suorum operum*

[19] Rogers, 72.
[20] Kerr, 45.

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potestatem is a crucial part. This gives us at least a cursory answer to the question of why human beings need power over their works: if they lacked it, they would be instrumental and, in some sense, superfluous. Thomas is worried, primarily, about making creatures superfluous to God. God could have willed to be the God who made creatures with no agency of their own, but that is not who God willed Godself to be. But it is also possible to imagine this kind of superfluousness coming from other sources. The capitalist class, we might say, at least on Marx's analysis, wills to be the kind of god that Thomas wants to be very clear he *isn't* describing, the God who has puppets, not creatures.[21]

But what is so important about *opera* to all this? Here, it is to compare the way that these two passages go about articulating Thomas' framework of noncompetitive agency, since Thomas explicitly names *suorum operum potestatem* in the prologue to I-II of the *Summa Theologica* but not in *Contra Gentiles* 3.69.13-14. One possible explanation of this is that, since the *Summa Theologica* is a later work, Thomas' articulation of double agency became more refined. Without discounting that possibility, it is worth noting that there are other differences. In the passages from *Contra Gentiles*, Thomas does not explicitly name human beings, but rather *the wise* and, specifically, creatures that share *divinae sapientiae*, divine wisdom. *Contra rationem sapientiae est ut sit aliquid frustra operibus sapientis* - it is contrary to wisdom's rational character for there to be anything useless in the working of the wise. Part of what it means for you to have wisdom is that your deliberate acts have real effects. Those who share God's wisdom will be like this. But human beings are not the only rational creatures God has made. God has made the angels, who are entirely incorporeal (*ST* I.50.1). While angels might assume bodies to be seen by other creatures (I.51.2), they do not sense with them or, for that matter, actually *do* anything with them (I.51.3). And this is the crucial point. Angelic bodies are, as it were, epiphenomenal. They are symptoms of their possessors. Human beings do not just, like the angels, take deliberate actions that have real effects. They do so *with their bodies* and, precisely in this way, they sense and interact with the world around them. That, we can conclude, is what it means for human beings to have *opera*. This argument is not ironclad. God, too, has *opera* - hence how God can work God's works in us in the first place. Then, again, God, too, has a human body, and it would not be out of line to say that all of God's working of God's works in us is, ultimately, a function of God assuming this body to Godself and, with it, working our salvation within material creation.

[21] Kerr, 44.

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We are now finally ready to propose a constructive Thomistic definition of "works" that goes beyond the dichotomy between the "spiritual" and the "economic" senses of the term laid out earlier. Works are the kind of real agency that God has given to creatures that are human. *Opera*, including, but not limited to, things that working class people do in factories and farms, homes and offices, schools and prisons, are the way that God has willed for human beings to act. They constitute things that human beings, as rational creatures, do with their material bodies to know and interact with themselves and others. As such, human beings must have real power over their works, because that is how they exercise the created agency that God has given them. To deny human beings power over their works is, paradoxically, to treat them either like nonhuman animals, who have bodies but no rational agency, or like angels, who have rational agency but no bodies.

This is related to another crucial differences between the two passages under consideration. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas does not talk about the image of God. Rather, he talks about God's likeness. There is a long tradition in Christian theology, which there isn't space to thoroughly review here, of distinguishing between the image of God and the likeness of God. Irenaeus, Athanasius, and the Cappadocians (to name just a few) all taught that, while human beings were made in the structural image of God, they had to grow up into the moral likeness of God by progressing in the virtues, "ever changing from glory to glory."

Thomas is completely in line with this tradition when he quotes John of Damascus in the prologue to I-II of the *Summa Theologica*, to say that the image of God implies *intellectuale et arbitrio liberum et per se potestavitum* (an intellectual nature with free will and "self-movement"). Recall that in *Contra Gentiles*, Thomas is talking about creatures that participate in divine wisdom and thereby share in God's likeness. Angels are, like human beings, intellectual beings, and, like human beings, they also have free will. But human beings, having bodies, move themselves in space and time. Therefore, unlike the angels, who, even though they need grace to turn to God (I.62.2) either are beatified beyond their capability to sin (I.62.8) or are damned beyond the possibility of redemption (I.64.2), all in an instant (I.62.5), as a result of their choice for or against life with God (I.62.4), human beings can grow and change, and therefore they can possess and grow in the virtues.

For Thomas, *Opera*, the intentional things that human beings do with their bodies in the world, are the modality in which the life of virtue is lived. It is with their *opera* that human beings participate in divine wisdom, a virtue which Thomas calls *prudence*. Prudence, Thomas says in *Summa Theologica* I-II.61.2, is the very act of reason, which is the principal virtue, in relation to which the others are

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defined (justice, for example, is the act of reason in relation to something else and temperance and fortitude prevent excess and timidity in its exercise, respectively). Note that the passage from *Summa Contra Gentiles* that we have been examining discusses the way that God gives creatures their movement. In giving a rock its weight, for example, God also gives it its *motum deorsum* - its downward motion. "Human beings are those special movers whose movement resembles God's." It is because they have a share in God's wisdom or providence that "God's pull and our push may best *coincide*, so that our acts and God's may both describe the same trajectory."[22] Rogers continues:

> All creatures, as such, are God-moved. God both moves them into existence, and without violence, but to perfect them, supplies them with movements of their own. So rocks move both by their own nature, which is to fall, and by attraction, toward their greatest good and deepest desire, which is the center of the earth. Plants move by their vegetal nature, which is by growing, and by attraction, to their greatest good and desire, which is the sun. Animals move by their animal nature, which is instinct, and by attraction, to their greatest good and deepest desire, which is Alpo. Humans likewise move by their rational nature, which is freedom, and by attraction to their greatest good and deepest desire, which is God. For humans move by reason, which is their freedom, and to be moved by God, who is their God, are not contrary or violent movements, but two levels of the same thing.[23]

Thus, Rogers says, "The Law of human nature is the presence of God's prudence in the prudent."[24] God's wisdom is not an abstract "arm chair" wisdom. It is not the peculiar genius of the enlightened subject, the Cartesian *cogito* of the rational individual. It is the prudential wisdom of a skilled craftsperson, wisdom that sets the universe in motion in just the right way to bring all things, naturally, to their natural end. In the virtue of prudence, human beings learn to move themselves in just such a way, to order their own lives and their common life with the rest of creation towards the common good, which is life abundant for all in friendship with the triune God. Human beings exercise this divine wisdom with their created bodies, moving themselves and those around them in space and time. That is why it is important that they not only have control over their actions, in general, but over their *opera*, works, that proceed under their power of physical, bodily movement. Human beings must have power over their works because that is how, as material

[22] Rogers, 74.
[23] *Ibid*, 74.
[24] *Ibid*, 77.

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creatures, they move in life and love with triune God under their own power.

The *telos* of this movement is to behold the beatific vision, to actually see and know God. Just as the life of virtue is the human way of participating in God's prudential wisdom, but only in a partial, finite, and incomplete way, so, too, are virtuous actions, good works, while they presume a certain knowledge of God in just this way, also fall infinitely short. As Thomas puts it in *Summa Theologica* I-II.5.5: *Omnis autem cognitio quae est secundum modum substantiae creatae, deficit a vision divinae essentiae, quae in infinitum excedit omnem substantiam creatam.* Every knowledge that follows the mode of a created substance falls short of a vision of the divine essence, which infinitely exceeds every created substance. On the one hand, when human beings work well, that is, with the virtues, they share in something of God's own prudential wisdom. But because their works have exclusively to do with things that are finite, bound in time and space, the knowledge that is involved in the virtuous life will always fall infinitely short of an actual vision of God's essence, no matter how much it progresses. Progress in virtue would thus be futile unless this natural motion, including the *opera*, the works, of which both Thomas and Marx speak, were itself contained in a supernatural movement, whereby God moves finally and decisively to wholly assume creatures to the Trinitarian life. That is why Thomas insists that true beatitude happens in the life of the age to come and is only foreshadowed in this life (*ST* I-II.5.3).

Nevertheless, human beings do have to move. *Habere autem perfectum bonum sine motu, convenit ei quod naturaliter habet illud. Habere autem beatitudinem naturaliter est solius Dei. Unde solius Dei proprium est quod ad beatitudinem non moveatur per aliquam operationem praecedentem.* Having perfect good without motion belongs to One who has it naturally, and having beatitude naturally belongs only to God. So only God isn't moved to the good. That's why Thomas says that Aristotle is right to say that *beatitudo est praemium virtuosarum operationum* - beatitude is the reward of virtuous working. Once again, *opera*, works, are the way that embodied rational agents move towards God - or, to put it the way that Thomas does in the Proemium to Question 2, *tendendi in deum* - stretching out into God. They are not sufficient, because, even though they presume a certain share in the prudential wisdom of the God who has ordered the universe, that share will always be partial and finite. But they are necessary, because God wills that human beings move, with their bodies, by their own rational agency, towards perfect happiness. In working well - under our own power! - we strive to attain a greater and greater share in divine wisdom, and this is not vain, because God has willed that we behold God face to face.

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Conclusion: Thomas and Marx Meet Sergei Bulgakov

The beatific vision, however, seems frightfully far off from the world of work under capitalism (or the industrial, statist version of communism represented by the Soviet Union) - so far off as to seem irrelevant. It is difficult to imagine that the cashier standing for hours on end at a store, the dishwasher in a busy restaurant, the prisoner fighting fires in southern California for a dollar a day, the teacher with an overcrowded elementary school classroom and too few books and supplies, the construction worker doing six ten-hour shifts a week in the August heat to finish a new gentrifying monstrosity in downtown Durham, the nurse or the hospital chaplain spending fifty or sixty hours a week, including overnights in a hospital ward - or any other working class person - is seeing something of the beatific vision. In fact, the idea that, if they just do their work virtuously, they will see something of it, sounds like a patronizing, dangerous, and repugnant idea. It sounds more like fascism than like something Marx, or any other anticapitalist, might ever think or say. Indeed, it could not be clearer that, when he talks of human living as a craft, Thomas is not writing about work under capitalist conditions.

It is as if, once again, we have two radically different descriptions of economy and the world of human work(s). One, Thomas' description, defines works as endemic to the craft of being human, as the way that human beings, as rational embodied agents, move toward or "stretch out into" God by doing things with their bodies, and, in so doing, know something of God's prudential wisdom by sharing in God's prudence through their growth in and practice of the virtues. The other, Marx's description, defines works as arduous, exploitative, and alienating things, the cursed work of the third chapter of Genesis - things that, aside from being physically, emotionally, and morally difficult, take place inside of a basically unfair power relation between the working class and the employing class, a relation that not only deprives or threatens to deprive working class people of their daily bread, but also makes them the authors of a world that is not their own, a world which confronts them as cold, mechanistic, and alien, and which breeds isolation, despondency, and death among the great majority of living people. It seems romantic at best, naive at worst to describe work in Thomas' terms when the realities named by Marx constitute the actual world of flesh and blood human beings. To describe work the way that Thomas does seems to be a luxury that only the hedonistic Whole Foods spirituality of the petite bourgeoisie can afford to indulge. This paper will conclude, then, in addressing these issues.

It is just as Thomas and Marx, in the midst of their heavenly conversation, are getting into precisely this argument, that we might

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imagine another figure speaking up out of the communion of saints, to help resolve their dispute: Sergei Bulgakov. Writing on the eve of the Russian revolution, Bulgakov, in his *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, sought to "overcome" the politics and epistemology of economic materialism, exemplified in but by no means limited to Marxism. "In practice," he wrote, "economists are Marxists, even if they hate Marxism."[25] Bulgakov, however, did not simply reject Marxism outright.

> In a certain sense, economic materialism is actually indestructible, insofar as it describes the immediate reality of a particular experience or apperception of the world that seeks theoretical expression in a scientific or philosophical doctrine. The doctrine may be quite unsuccessful in its execution, but this does not invalidate the mood that created it. That particular, undeniable life truth that our contemporary society has glimpsed and intimately felt with great seriousness and bitter sincerity makes economic materialism in a sense irrefutable. It cannot be simply denied or rejected like any other scientific theory. It must be understood and interpreted, not only in its mistakes and weaknesses, but also in that profound content which shimmers through it. It must be, not denied, but *overcome from within*, explained in its limitations as a philosophical "abstract principle," in which one side of the truth is sold as the whole truth.[26]

Bulgakov sees something deeply true in Marxism (more on this later) and sets himself the task to "overcome" it "from within," that is, to explain the conditions that it speaks to - conditions that "our contemporary society has glimpsed and intimately felt with great seriousness and bitter sincerity" - in such a way as to address *both* what it gets right *and* what it gets wrong.

Bulgakov does this by making two arguments that are deeply interwoven in his book. First, *politically*, Marxism takes for granted the conditions of scarcity in which human beings live, which, according to a Christian conception, are really a symptom of the fall. Second, *epistemologically*, Marxism takes for granted the conditions of alienation that undergird Kant's distinction between subject and object. Thus, Bulgakov will help Marx and Thomas talk to each other in two ways. First, he will relate their two visions of work to one another. Second, he will explain Marx's epistemological problems to Thomas, who, blessedly, has never read Kant, and show Marx how Thomas can help him solve these problems by presenting labor as a kind of epistemology, that is, by understanding works as a way that human beings move themselves towards God by doing things with

[25] Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. And ed., Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,2000), 41.

[26] *Ibid*, 39.

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their bodies and, thereby, participate in a share of God's prudential wisdom.

Marxists, Bulgakov indicates, are right about something, specifically the idea that human beings inhabit a world of scarcity, in which they struggle against the raw forces of nature for their bare existence, and, therefore, with one another for control over the natural resources on which their survival depends. "This is the world in which we live now, prisoners of our material needs; and this is the world that Marx took to be the only real one," Catherine Evtuhov explains.[27] In such a world, all history really will be the history of class struggle, and this is the history described by Marx. For Bulgakov, however, Marxism has a radically truncated sociohistorical vision, in which "one side of the truth is sold as the whole truth."

> According to Bulgakov's vision, man and nature originally lived in harmony in an "Edenic economy" - in other words, in the world as it was before original sin. The Fall, however, dragged all of creation into a sinful state, in which man must struggle for survival, eking out a painful existence from an unfriendly, mechanized nature . . . .But, according to Bulgakov, the world we live in potentially has a much deeper meaning than mere labor "in the sweat of our face" which characterizes our current existence: actually, the world even in its present imperfect state potentially partakes of Divine Wisdom. In rare moments of revelation, we catch a glimpse of what life was like in the Garden of Eden: in fact, the purpose of Christ's coming was to reveal to us this perfect, harmonious world that could be ours. We must find within ourselves this hidden potential for perfection and work to *resurrect* nature, to endow it once again with the life and meaning it had in Eden. As the economy became Christian and "sophic," all of nature and the world would be endowed with life and meaning, man had an active part to play in bringing this about. It was in our power to transform the world, to bring it to life, to return it to that perfect harmonious existence in love and labor from which Adam and Eve wrenched it with their original sin.[28]

If Marx understands works to be arduous, the occasion for exploitation, alienated from working class people by a process of commodification in which they become the authors of a world that confronts them as alien and if Thomas understands works to be things that human beings do to move toward or "stretch out into" God with their bodies by practicing the virtues, particularly prudence, whereby they exercise a share in God's wisdom, Bulgakov sees these two definitions as two movements in a drama that has three parts: Eden,

[27] Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890-1920* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 147.

[28] *Ibid*, 147.

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Fall, and Resurrection. Marxism sells "one side of the truth . . . as the whole truth" because it only describes human and cosmic movement *away* from God, i.e. the Fall. What Thomas is describing is movement *into* God, which Bulgakov names both Eden and Resurrection. Where Marx might righteously rage at Thomas for not talking about works in terms of the actual evils that workers suffer, Bulgakov might chide Marx for his failure of imagination, for failing to understand that the world that he describes has not always existed and will not always exist. In a great irony, the paradigmatic theorist of revolutionary hope has failed to be hopeful enough, and he needs theology to rehabilitate his system.

In order to say how and why this is so, we need to turn to epistemology. Thomas says that, because they are how human beings grow in the virtues, and specifically how they exercise prudence, works are how human beings share in the prudential wisdom of God. Working is about knowing, and this is counterintuitive for most modern thinkers - though perhaps not as much for Marx as for some others. Marx, as we have already seen in looking at the philosophical method he lays out in *The German Ideology*, is quite critical of purely cognitive ways of knowing - of exclusively theoretical reason, we might say. But, Bulgakov thinks that Marx is still haunted by the spectre of Kant. He still thinks about knowledge in subject-object terms, even if his object of choice is no longer the human person "narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived," but "man in the flesh." For Bulgakov, the absolute distance, what Marx would call the "alienation," between human beings and nature that comes about as a result of the Fall and the loss of the "Edenic economy," is precisely what Kant describes as the subject-object relation. Just like Marx, Bulgakov thinks Kant takes fallen humanity as normative. Marx takes it as normative that human beings struggle to survive the world. Kant takes it as normative that human beings struggle to know the world. Both discount the ways that "the world even in its present imperfect state potentially partakes of the Divine Wisdom" that held human beings and nature together in harmony in Eden and which still constitutes a "hidden potential for perfection." "Fundamentally," writes Evtuhov, "idealism in both its Kantian and its contemporary critical form, in its concentration on the knowing subject and the procedure of knowledge, had no means of accounting for a world external to the subject It could ask 'How is knowledge possible?' but not 'How is nature possible?'"[29] For Bulgakov, and for Thomas, the answer to these two questions was the same. Both knowledge and nature are possible becuase creation is held together by "Divine Wisdom."

[29] *Ibid*, 160.

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Remember that Thomas says, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that sharing in *divinae sapientiae*, "Divine Wisdom," is what makes human beings the subjects of their actions. *Contra rationem sapientiae est ut sit aliquid frustra operibus sapientis* - it is contrary to wisdom's rational character for there to be anything useless in the working of the wise. This is why human beings, as embodied rational agents, must have power over their works, that is, to share in God's prudential wisdom by exercising their own prudence. Human beings know the world by freely participating in it (another word we might use for this is "experience"), that is, by having power over their own works - by building houses and planting vineyards and raising children - which have real effects on themselves and others. They will know the world well if their participation is virtuous, that is, if, by their power over their works, they share in the prudential wisdom by which God made the world and is reconciling it to Godself. Note that this is NOT about natural theology as twentieth century theology understood it. It isn't about reading moral data off of the world. It is about knowing the world virtuously by participating in it virtuously, something that is only possible in the human and divine person of Jesus Christ, our way of stretching out into God (*ST* proemeum to I.Q2). It's not that creation is an object to observe and thereby learn things about God. Creation is the theater in which we participate in God's own knowledge.

Bulgakov, as we have seen, helps Thomas talk to Marx about two ways that his social vision is impoverished because it takes the Fall for granted. First, Marx takes for granted that work is a struggle for survival. Second, Marx cannot see work as anything other than a way of surviving because he can't see it as a way of knowing creation and sharing in God's knowledge - which necessarily includes God's self-knowledge, what Thomas calls the "science of God and the blessed" (*ST* I.1.2). He sees that work can give you food, shelter, and clothing, but he cannot see that, precisely in doing this, it can also help you start to see the beatific vision. The people must have power over their works both for food, shelter, and clothing, and for the first fruits of beatitude, as well.

This demand, the demand for a truly communist society is, in the words of another old labor song, a demand by workers for bread, but it is a demand for roses, too.[30] This should make sense to theologians, since the Rose, as a symbol for Mary, has always stood for beatified humanity. It is a demand not only that work be safe and properly compensated, and that these things be guaranteed through a fundamental alteration in the power relations in which it takes place.

[30] James Oppenheim, "Bread and Roses" in The Industrial Workers of the World, *The Little Red Songbook: To Fan the Flames of Discontent* (Ypsilanti, MI: IWW General Headquarters, 1995), 76.

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It is also a demand to change the kind of thing that work is. When Marxists turn resurrection into revolution and equate it with food security, education, healthcare, and truly compensatory wages for all, they aren't wrong - they haven't been radical enough. When workers really do have power over their works, that is, when they have seized the means of production and expropriated the wealth of the capitalist class, it is absolutely true that there will be no boss always buying their labor at less than it is worth, throwing them into poverty and social misery. It is true that addressing the power relation between the working class and the employing class is the true way to address hunger and want. But if that's all that communism is, it will fail to be truly humanizing, because it will fail to address human beings as they actually are, that is, as God created them and is reconciling them to Godself, and because it will fail to address what human works are actually for, i.e., exactly what Thomas says they are for - knowing God and stretching out into God's very life. Works are not just for getting bread by the sweat of your brow. Rather, they are about nothing less than human and cosmic resurrection.

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