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# PHILOSOPHICAL & THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS ON THE TRINITY



EDITED BY

THOMAS McCALL

& MICHAEL C. REA

# Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity

**Thomas McCall**

**and**

**Michael Rea**

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# (p.ix) Notes on Contributors

- Jeffrey Brower is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University.
- William Lane Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology.
- Richard Cross is Reverend John A. O’Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.
- William Hasker is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Huntington University.
- Daniel Howard-Snyder is Professor of Philosophy at Western Washington University.
- Christopher Hughes is Reader in Philosophy at King's College London.
- Peter van Inwagen is John Cardinal O’Hara Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.
- Brian Leftow is Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford University.
- Thomas McCall is Associate Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
- Carl Mosser is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University.
- Alan G. Padgett is Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary.
- Alexander R. Pruss is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Baylor University.
- Michael C. Rea is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.
- Richard Swinburne is Emeritus Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford University.
- Keith Yandell is Julius R. Weinberg Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. **(p.x)**

# Introduction

**Thomas McCall**

**Michael C. Rea**

Classical Christian orthodoxy insists that God is *Triune*: there is only one God, and this God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) states that the Father and Son are*homoousios* (of one substance). The Athanasian Creed expresses this central Christian conviction starkly: “So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God.” Belief in both the distinctness and the divinity of the persons, on one hand, and belief in the oneness or unity of God, on the other hand, are essential to orthodox Christian belief. But what does this really mean? And how could it possibly be true?

What theologians sometimes refer to as the “threeness–oneness problem of the Trinity,” and what philosophers call the “logical problem of the Trinity” is well-known. It arises from the conjunction of three central tenets of the doctrine:

(T1) There is exactly one God.

(T2) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical.

(T3) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are consubstantial.

The logical problem is that the conjunction of T1–T3 appears to be flatly inconsistent. This problem may be expressed as follows:

(LPT1) There is exactly one God, the Father Almighty (from T1).

(LPT2) The Father is God (from LPT1).

(LPT3) The Son is consubstantial with but not identical to the Father (from T2 and T3).

(LPT4) If there are *x* and *y* such that *x* is a God, *x* is not identical to *y*, and *y* is consubstantial with*x*, then it is not the case that there is exactly one God (premise).

(LPT5) Therefore: It is not the case that there is exactly one God (from LPT2, LPT3, and LPT4).

It seems that the only way out is either to give up at least one of T1–T3 or to abandon LPT4. But to give up any of the central tenets of the doctrine is to give up the doctrine itself, so something must be done with LPT4. The Trinitarian theologian, it seems, must find some way to reject LPT4, and to do so without giving up either coherence or orthodoxy.

This conundrum, arising as it does at the very heart of the Christian faith, has hardly gone unnoticed by Christian thinkers. Attempts by Christian theologians to account for the apparent inconsistency are often lumped together **(p.2)** into one of two groups and affixed with the appropriate label: they are versions of either "Latin Trinitarianism" or "Greek Trinitarianism." Recent work by historical theologians specializing in patristic and medieval theology now casts doubt on such generalized characterizations, and we are inclined to concur with such re-assessment.[1] At any rate, however, although engagement with such historical spadework is important in many ways, it is not our main concern in this project. Instead we are focused on contemporary discussions of the "threeness–oneness problem." Proposed solutions to the problem generally fly under one of three flags: Social Trinitarianism, Latin Trinitarianism, or Relative Trinitarianism.

## Social Trinitarianism

Neither the defenders of nor the detractors from Social Trinitarianism (ST) have been especially clear about the core tenets of their view. Cornelius Plantinga offers an initial characterization of it as a Trinitarian theory according to which "Father, Son, and Spirit [are] distinct centers of consciousness…[and] Father, Son, and Spirit must be tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible" claims to monotheism.[2] Some proponents of *other* models could also claim this, but ST is usually associated as well with the claims that it "starts" with threeness and moves toward oneness, that the divine persons are numerically distinct, and that the unity of the Trinity can be helpfully understood by way of a "social analogy": the divine persons are relevantly like a family, a supremely unified community of monarchs, or three human persons whose interpersonal relationships are so strong as to be unbreakable. Defenders of ST are prone to deny that the divine persons are autonomous or even possibly separated.[3] They often (although, as we shall see, not always) conceive of the divine persons as distinct **(p.3)** substances who share a generic divine nature which they hold together in common.

Perhaps the core tenets of ST might be helpfully summarized as follows:

(ST1) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are “of one essence,” but are not numerically the same substance. Rather, the divine persons are consubstantial only in the sense that they share the divine nature in common. Furthermore, this sharing of a common nature can be understood in a fairly straightforward sense via the “social analogy” in which Peter, James, and John share human nature.

(ST2) Properly understood, the central claim of monotheism that there is but one God is to be understood as the claim that there is one divine nature – not as the claim that there is exactly one divine substance.

(ST3) The divine persons must each be in full possession of the divine nature and in some particular relation R to one another for Trinitarianism to count as monotheism.

But what is this particular relation R? Here the proponents of ST offer several candidates:

(Ra) Being the only members of the divine kind.

(Rb) Being the only members of the community that exists necessarily and that necessarily is sovereign over all that is not divine.

(Rc) Being the only members of the divine family. (Rd) Enjoying perfect love and harmony of will with one another (in starkest contrast to pagan pantheons).

(Re) Being necessarily mutually interdependent, so that no divine person can possibly exist apart from the other divine persons.

Richard Swinburne's version of ST clearly endorses (Rd) and Re), and surely he would embrace (Rb) and (Rc) too.[4] In the original version of *The Coherence of Theism* (1977), Swinburne mounted an argument that there could be at most one divine individual. He later came to see that this argument was “unsound,” and, as we can see from his contribution to this work, he then adopted a robust version of ST.[5]

Swinburne holds that ST allows for both intelligibility and consistency with creedal orthodoxy. He takes the view that the creeds should *not* be read as if they were claiming both that there are three divine individuals and exactly one divine individual. To read the creeds this way would be to charge the framers of these

statements with insisting that Christians believe something that is nonsense, but surely no charitable rendering of these statements would charge them with something that outrageous. Since it is patently false that there is exactly one divine individual and exactly three divine individuals, Swinburne argues that there are three divine individuals. The three divine persons are three souls, three rational individuals.

And how is this not tritheism? What is it that makes the persons *one God*? According to Swinburne, tritheism is the view that there are "three independent **(p.4)** divine beings, any of which could exist without the other; or which would act independently of each other."[6] And, given Swinburne's endorsement of (Re), his model avoids tritheism (as he portrays it). The Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God in the sense that together they make up "the source of being of all other things" and "has to it this kind of indivisible unity."[7]

Such efforts by the proponents of ST to secure a claim to monotheism have not escaped criticism (some of which is sharp indeed).[8] Some critics raise worries about the consistency of such accounts of monotheism with the creedal statements themselves (e.g., Brower, "The Problem with Social Trinitarianism"), while others raise other criticisms. For instance, Dale Tuggy argues that ST does not fit well with scriptural portrayals of God, that STentails that God is not a person and thus that God is not divine, that ST finally amounts to a kind of polytheism that only denies the charge by an appeal to "perichoresis" that Tuggy finally judges to be completely vacuous due to its being "firmly stuck at the metaphorical level" and thus simply hiding "an unintelligible claim," and especially that ST involves God in some kind of malevolent deception.[9] William Hasker's chapter (Chapter 3) defends ST by responding to some of Tuggy's criticisms. After describing Tuggy's primary objections in some detail, Hasker both challenges some of the methodological assumptions that seem to motivate Tuggy's concerns and engages Tuggy's claim that ST would amount to a case of malevolent divine deception. When we take seriously the concept of "progressive revelation" (not to mention the development of doctrine), Hasker concludes that Tuggy's main problem with ST is more illusory than substantial.

Brian Leftow's objections to ST stand at the forefront of the criticisms. In his essay "Anti Social Trinitarianism" (Chapter 4), Leftow argues that there are two major problems for ST: the first challenge facing ST is "to explain why its three Persons are 'not three Gods, but one God,' and to do so without transparently misreading the Creed" (p. 000). The second task looks every bit as daunting: it is

“providing an account of monotheism which is both intuitively acceptable and lets ST count as monotheist.”[10] More specifically, Leftow argues that ST compromises adequate doctrines of omniscience and omnipotence, and that it finally collapses into either incoherence or a version of polytheism he refers to as “Plantingean Arianism.”

**(p.5)** Leftow's criticisms are challenging; and, though they may not be decisive against ST generally, they at least manage to identify some of the main weaknesses in the models that fall under his critique.[11] Thus, even if his arguments don’t quite land the knockout punch, some of ST's foremost defenders have seen the need to bolster their view. And it is not hard to see why. Consider

(1) *x* is a man = $_{df}$ *x* is a human substance

(1) seems plausible enough; in fact, it seems hard to deny. But

(2) *y* is a god = $_{df}$ *y* is a divine substance

appears to be parallel to (1); it seems every bit as plausible. But if (2) is allowed, then surely

(3) polytheism = the view that there is more than one divine substance

is undeniable. But if so, then polytheism seems to follow ST's affirmation that the three divine persons are distinct substances who share a generic kind-essence or nature.

In light of such concerns, William Lane Craig offers

(Rf) Being parts of a whole that is itself divine

as another way of accounting for the monotheism-securing relation between the divine persons. In Chapter 5, Craig responds directly to Leftow's criticisms by suggesting that the Triune God is composed of the divine persons in a way that is analogous to the way in which Cerberus, the three-headed watchdog of Hades in Greek mythology, might be composed of “three centers of consciousness” (and even in some sense as three distinct agents) while still being rightly counted as exactly one complete dog. On his view, there are two different ways for a thing to be canine: one which guarantees that the thing in question is a dog, the other of which guarantees only that it is part of a dog. Thus, Cerberus's three centers of consciousness count as fully canine, but they do not count as dogs, and they compose only one dog. Likewise, in the case of the Trinity, there are two ways

for something to be divine: one which guarantees that the thing is a God, and another which guarantees only that it is part of a God. In the Trinity, there are three centers of consciousness who are each fully divine in the second way, but who compose a being that is divine in the first way. Thus, three divine individuals compose exactly one God without themselves being Gods. Craig concludes that "God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of consciousness, intentionality and volition, as social trinitarians maintain" (p. 000).

**(p.6)** Critics of ST, however, are far from mollified by the mereological defense of ST. Daniel Howard-Snyder thinks that Craig's view is both unstable at the periphery and rotten at the core, and he concludes that this model is not a version of monotheism at all. In Chapter 6, Howard-Snyder develops several criticisms of the analogies; here he wonders if there even *could be* such a thing as Cerberus at all. He is highly skeptical of the potential of the analogies Craig offers – even if they were to work on their own, he insists, they would at best only offer an analogy for the "avowedly tritheistic" ST of Swinburne (p. 119).

As we shall see, Howard-Snyder mounts distinctly theological arguments as well. He makes a spirited argument to the conclusion that because ST's "whole" Triune God is not, strictly speaking, *a* person, God cannot perform the intentional actions of creation and redemption, thus he says that mereological ST leaves us with the unwelcome conclusion that the "first sentence of the Bible expresses a necessary falsehood" (p. 121). Because God is not *a* person, God cannot know, choose, or act at all – such a "God," Howard-Snyder concludes, cannot be considered worship-worthy. Monotheism is not a plastic word, nor is the concept a wax nose that can be turned any direction to suit any fancy. Instead, Howard-Snyder contends, genuine monotheism holds that there is one God, that "something can be a God without exemplifying the property of being triune and that nothing can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being a person." The result, he says, is that Craig's version of Trinity Monotheism is "*not* a version of monotheism" at all (p. 124).

Craig has responded at length to Howard-Snyder elsewhere; but here, as our seventh chapter, we have published an abbreviated response written specially for this volume. The main focus of the response is on defending the central claim that there are *two ways* for something to be (e.g.) canine, feline, or divine, one of which guarantees only that the thing in question is part of (e.g.) a dog, cat, or

God.

Carl Mosser's criticisms of ST (Chapter 8) are more wide-ranging than Howard-Snyder's. Whereas Howard-Snyder primarily has mereological versions of ST in view, Mosser's target is three traits that he takes to characterize most, if not all versions of ST: (1) appeal for precedent to a simple story about the development of trinitarian theology, (2) insistence that the members of the Trinity are persons in the "full," modern sense who relate to one another in community, and (3) a particular way of substantiating the claim about personhood from scripture. Mosser begins by arguing that the "simple story" about the development of Trinitarian theology is false. He then goes on to argue that the claim of full (contemporary-sense) personhood and social community for the members of the Trinity is deeply problematic, as is the Biblical hermen-eutic commonly marshaled in defense of ST.

Finally, our section on Social Trinitarianism concludes with a chapter in which Keith Yandell offers an account that emphasizes (Re) in such a way that it appears to approach (Rf). (He is rather tentative, however, about embracing the "ST" label.) He spells out what he takes the monotheism-securing relation to be as this: it is one in which the divine persons are *necessarily strongly particularly internally* **(p.7)** *related*. After defining his use of such terms as "complexity" and "simplicity" for use in Trinitarian theology, he argues that, when armed with the right understanding of these concepts, we can conclude that the Triune God is a complex being (though not one composed of proper parts!) who is what he calls simple(i) (not composed of parts) but not simple(ii) (where this refers to lack of complexity). The payoff is this: God is a Trinity of persons who are conscious (indeed, they are capable of self-consciousness) rational agents, and it is logically impossible that any Trinitarian person exist in the absence of any other Trinitarian person. Thus we have one God who is complex (though not composite), and we have three divine persons who are numerically distinct from one another though logically inseparable. Yandell's "metaphysical structure" comes with no handy-dandy analogy, and it may draw charges of being unacceptably *ad hoc* due to his unusual account of complexity. But depending upon the goals pursued in philosophical theology, this may not be so discouraging for Yandell – to show that the doctrine of the Trinity need not be either formally or informally inconsistent is a pretty good day of "playing defense" against the common and serious charges.

## "Latin" Trinitarianism

Brian Leftow (Chapter 10) defends a view that he labels “Latin Trinitarianism.” The extent to which this label is historically apt is open to question (for one thing, as we shall see, Leftow's model holds that the divine persons are temporal parts of God, and it is not exactly clear how this might possibly cohere with any of the classical doctrines of divine simplicity). Minimally, though, it is “Latin” in the sense that it comes down on the “Latin” or “Western” side of the modern East/ West schema by clearly beginning with divine oneness. The divine persons have but one trope of divinity, which is just God's. To illustrate this, Leftow appeals to a time-travel analogy: he asks us to imagine a single Rockette, Jane, who saves the performance when her two dancing partners call in sick by climbing into a time machine between the dancings of leftmost Jane, centermost Jane, and rightmost Jane. The payoff here is said to be this: there are clearly three *somethings*, and these three somethings are distinct but not discrete. There are three dancings, and each is genuinely distinct from the other. But there is only one substance, and that is Jane.

Initially this may seem odd, and perhaps even wrong-headed. Is Jane dancing on the left really distinct enough to deserve the honorific title “leftmost Jane?” At first glance, the answer would appear to be negative: to call her “leftmost Jane” is actually a bit misleading, for she is really just “Jane-in-the-leftmost-position.” In other words, she is just plain Jane standing and dancing on the left. To this point it is not altogether clear exactly what Leftow intends: are the occupants of the three positions (leftmost, centermost, and rightmost Jane(s) ) really *three* occupants – or just *one*? If there is really just one – Jane – who is wholly located in **(p.8)** multiple positions, then the relation between leftmost, centermost, and rightmost Jane is one of strict identity, and the analogy as a whole smacks of modalism. On the other hand, it might be the case that the occupants of the three positions are three genuinely distinct items – dancing events, perhaps. In this case the relation between them is not identity; but we are left wondering what to make of the claim that each of them *is Jane* (since Jane is not identical to any dancing event). Likewise, then, if the divine persons are analogous to *events involving Jane*, it is hard to see any sense in which each person “is” God. Thus, it is not immediately clear what this analogy is supposed to say about intra-Trinitarian relations.

Elsewhere, however, Leftow says more. In “Modes without Modalism,” he appeals to the notion of “Locke-persons” to help develop his view.[12] A Locke-person is a person who exists when and only when a particular “consciousness” exists.[13] Locke-persons are “event-based” persons – roughly, persons whose

existence is constituted by the occurrence of a particular event (in this case, a particular consciousness). Leftow is not committed to the idea that *human* persons are Locke-persons; all he needs for his view is the claim that divine persons might be understood as (or as analogous to) Locke-persons. Thus, he summarizes his view as follows:

> [M]y Lockean "mode"-based suggestion about the Trinity then, is this. Perhaps the triune Persons are event-based persons founded on a generating substance, God…these streams are mental events, and each such stream is the life of a Locke-person. God never exists save *in* the Persons…there is just one God who generates and lives as the three Persons, by generating and living in three distinct mental streams.[14]

Thus, on his view, there is but one divine substance, who just is God. Monotheism is preserved; but the life of this one God is composed of three event-based persons who exist simultaneously. Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is preserved.

Leftow's proposal raises questions and concerns that are both interesting and important. Are these three event-based persons really consubstantial? The answer to this is not entirely clear. As event-based persons, these Locke-persons *involve* a common substance, but this alone does not guarantee consubstantiality. Painting a wall red involves (at least) two events: the wall becoming wet and the wall becoming red. But these events do not share a common nature at all – not even a generic nature. Thus they are not consubstantial.

Leftow refers to these event-based persons as temporal parts of God. They are parts which "add up to" the life of the one God.[15] But how this might get Leftow to one substance is not exactly obvious. Indeed, it would seem that there are problems lurking. If the personal parts add up to one God, then we are left to wonder how the one God (who is a whole) could be identical with any of the parts (much less with each of the parts). Distinct parts do not have all the properties possessed by the whole, nor does the whole have all of the distinct properties of **(p.9)** the parts (presumably, the property *being a part of a whole* belongs to the part but not to the whole). Thus any part – even a part that is a divine Locke-person – of the Triune God is not identical to the Triune God. We are, then, left wondering what to make of Leftow's claim that each of the persons just *is* God. Of course Leftow might have a lot more to say about these issues. But until more *is* said, it is hard to know just what to make of the view.

Leftow characterizes his view as distinctively “Latin” in orientation; but, as we noted earlier (and as Leftow himself acknowledges elsewhere), recent historical scholarship has cast serious doubt upon the “Latin/Greek” classificatory scheme that has dominated scholarship on the Trinity for most of the twentieth century. One might think that the classificatory scheme is only so much terminological housekeeping, and that nothing of real importance hinges upon it. But to think this would be a mistake. The “Latin/Greek” classificatory scheme posits a substantial difference in the starting points – beginning with the *unity* in the Godhead vs. beginning with the *plurality* – between so-called Latin and Greek models; and it is typically invoked by Social Trinitarians in support of the claim that their own plurality-emphasizing models fall squarely within one of two dominant yet very divergent traditions of reflection on the Trinity (namely, the Greek tradition). But if that classificatory scheme is no longer viable, new doubts might be raised about the historical pedigree of contemporary ST models or, on the other hand, about the equally standard claim that there is a tradition of Trinitarian reflection that stands in stark opposition to those sorts of models.

In Chapter 11, Richard Cross explores some of the relevant historical considerations, arguing that the differences between Latin and Greek thought on the Trinity are not nearly as stark as they often have been taken to be – so much so that, given Leftow's characterization of Latin Trinitarianism, “some Greek theologians turn out to be ‘Latin Trinitarians’ too”. On Cross's view, “the salient feature [of LT] is that the only features of the divine persons that distinguish them from each other are their mutual relations.” But, he argues, this is a view that was endorsed by Gregory of Nyssa, whose views are normally regarded as the paradigm historical example of “Greek” Trinitarianism (pp. 202, 212).

## Relative Trinitarianism

Recall our summary of the logical problem of the Trinity. Crucial to the formulation of the problem is

> (LPT4) If there are *x* and *y* such that *x* is a God, *x* is not identical to *y*, and *y* is consubstantial with*x*, then it is not the case that there is exactly one God (Premise)

What sometimes goes unnoticed (or taken for granted) however, is that (LPT4) is true only if

> (P) Necessarily, if *x* and *y* are not identical, then *x* and *y* are not numerically the same substance

**(p.10)** is true. If P is false, then it is possible that *x* and *y* are numerically the same but not identical. Thus it is possible that the divine persons are genuinely distinct but yet, by virtue of their consubstantiality, one and the same God.

But giving up P seems like a tall order. For doing so commits one to something like the following principle:

> (RI1) States of affairs of the following sort are possible: *x* is an F, *y* is an F, *x* is a G, *y* is a G, *x* is the same F as y, but *x* is not the same G as y.

The problem with RI1, however, is that "*x* is the same F as *y*" seems to imply that *x* is *identical* to *y*(sameness implies, or just is, identity); and identity is classically understood as obeying Leibniz's Law:

> (LL) For all *x* and *y*, $x = y \rightarrow Fx$ if and only if F*y*.

But, of course, if *sameness* obeys LL, then RI1 is false.

In the philosophical literature on identity and related topics, one finds only two options for making sense of RI1. The first option is to grant that sameness implies identity and to endorse the doctrine that identity is sortal-relative. Sortal terms are kind terms, or count nouns (like "horse" or "man" or "table"). So the doctrine that identity is sortal-relative says, roughly, that identity statements might be*true* relative to one sortal but false relative to another. In other words, it says that what RI1 claims about *sameness* statements also holds for *identity* statements. This doctrine is true only if either there is no such thing as "classical identity" (i.e., an identity relation that obeys Leibniz's Law) or there is such a relation, but it is to be analyzed in terms of more "fundamental" relativized identity statements (so that $x = y$ only if, for every sortal F, a more fundamental identity relation – one which we might symbolize as "$=_F$" – holds between *x* and y). Thus, the doctrine of relative identity proper – the *pure*doctrine of relative identity – might be thought of as the conjunction of RI1 with RI2:

> (RI2) Either absolute (classical) identity does not exist, or statements of the form "$x = y$" are to be analyzed in terms of statements of the form "*x* is the same F as *y* " rather than the other way around.

The most prominent defenders of the pure doctrine of relative identity are P. T. Geach and Nicholas Griffin.[16] The doctrine has been explicitly invoked in solving the problem of the Trinity by, among others, A. P. Martinich.[17]

**(p.11)** The second option is simply to deny that sameness implies identity and to provide some sort of alternative understanding of "*x* is the same F as *y*". This second option grants the relativity of *sameness*without, strictly speaking, going so far as to endorse the relativity of *identity*. Hence, those who try to solve the problem of the Trinity by invoking this option might aptly be described as offering *impure*relative identity solutions.

In Chapter 12, Peter van Inwagen describes in some detail a logic of relative sameness within which (he argues) the doctrine of Trinity is both statable and provably consistent. Van Inwagen remains neutral on the question whether RI2 is true, and he explicitly rejects "supposed examples of nontheological 'cases of relative identity' " (p. 000). Thus, he does not commit himself to a pure doctrine of relative identity; nor does he even commit to the view that the logic he constructs has utility outside of Christian theology. (Indeed, he says that as far as he can tell, it does not [p. 000].) His goal is simply to provide a way of stating the doctrine of the Trinity that is demonstrably free from contradiction.

Despite its demonstrated utility in solving the logical problem of the Trinity, the doctrine of relative identity has remained very unpopular. Some of the reasons for this are given in the chapters by Michael Rea (13) and Christopher Hughes (16). For example, Hughes notes that the examples standardly used to motivate the doctrine of relative identity can all be accommodated satisfactorily without supposing that identity is sortal-relative. And Rea argues that invoking the pure doctrine of relative identity as a solution to the problem of the Trinity implies that the difference between the divine persons is theory-dependent, thus forcing us in the direction either modalism or anti-realism – two equally unpalatable alternatives.

Moreover, Rea goes on to argue that even the impure relative identity solution is problematic if it is not supplemented by an account of what it *means* to say (e.g.) that "*x* is the same God as *y*." The reason is simple: sameness statements are naturally understood as equivalent to identity statements; and identity is naturally understood as obeying Leibniz's Law. Thus, merely to endorse RI1 without endorsing RI2 leaves it an absolute mystery what one might mean by saying "the Father is the same God as the Son." Far from solving the problem, this sort of solution simply replaces one mystery with another. What is needed, then, is a supplemental story that provides a plausible instance of RI1 and that helps us to see why at least some sameness statements are not equivalent to identity statements.

Telling just such a supplemental story is exactly what Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea do in their advocacy and defense of the "constitution view" (Chapter 14). They begin by drawing attention to a well-known problem in metaphysics: the problem of material constitution. This problem arises whenever it appears **(p.12)** that there are two objects that share all the same parts and yet have different modal properties (bronze statues, lumps of bronze, etc). They then defend an Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution: numerical sameness without identity. So, for example, consider a statue which is also a pillar. Arguably, the statue and the pillar are different things: erosion can destroy the statue while leaving the pillar; weakening the structural integrity of the statue so that it can no longer bear the load of a roof destroys the pillar (by destroying its ability to function as a pillar) but leaves the statue. Nevertheless, our common-sense counting practices suggest that the statue and the pillar are one *material object*. (Imagine taking a poll of tourists not yet corrupted by philosophy, and asking, while pointing at the pillar/statue, "How many material objects are there?") According to Brower and Rea, the right thing to say about the statue/ pillar case is that the statue and the pillar each are compounds of *matter and form* (in Aristotelian terms, they are *hylomorphic compounds*); and they are *different* hylomorphic compounds but the *same material object*. Moreover, they say, *x* and *y* are the same material object (at a time) if, and only if, *x* is a material object, *y* is a material object, and either *x* is identical to *y* or *x* and *y* share all of the same matter at the relevant time.

Applying the analogy to the case of God, Brower and Rea say that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be understood as doing something analogous to sharing the same matter. Of course, the persons of the Trinity are not material things; but they can fruitfully be thought of as compounds of a sort, wherein the divine essence plays the *role* of Aristotelian matter and each of the three person-constituting properties ("Fatherhood," "Sonship," and "Spiration," for example) play the role of form. Thus, as in the case of the statue and the pillar, the persons of the Trinity stand in the relationship of numerical sameness without identity: they are one and the same God, but different persons. And the claim is under-girded by a corresponding claim about what it is for *x* and *y* to count as the same God: *x* and *y*are the same God if, and only if, *x* is a God, *y* is a God, and *x* and *y* do something analogous to sharing all of the same matter in common.

Brower and Rea are optimistic that their view can account for a wider range of the important theological desiderata than any of the major competing views. Like ST, their view posits three divine persons who are really distinct. Unlike

some versions of ST, however, their view also insists that there is one divine individual substance. Unlike other versions of ST, and unlike Leftow's LT as well, they are able to deny that the Trinity is composed of parts. Like van Inwagen, they hold both to numerical sameness and real distinction between the persons. But their view remains consistent with the claim that classical identity exists and that it is not to be analyzed in terms of more fundamental sortal-relativized sameness relations.

The final three essays in this part of the book critically engage the constitution view (and Christopher Hughes's chapter engages a variety of other views as well). William Lane Craig (Chapter 15) raises a variety of objections, perhaps the most important of which is that the central analogy of the Constitution view seems to be misguided. The constitution view states that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are **(p.13)** related in a way analogous to the way in which things sharing the same matter in common are related. The trouble, however, according to Craig, is just this:

> [The constitution view] does not tell us how seemingly mutually exclusive hylomorphic compounds can be numerically the same object. We are told that one object can be both a hand and a fist. All right. But how can one object be simultaneously a clenched fist and an open hand?…How can Socrates be at once seated Socrates, standing Socrates, and reclining Socrates? How can the *Winged Victory* and the *David* and the *Venus de Milo* be numerically the same object? These are the correct analogies to the Trinity, where the same spiritual object is said to be at once the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (p. 288)

Of course, Craig probably doesn't mean here that the latter analogies are ones that *he* prefers. For, as we have seen, his own favored analogy is a *part–whole* analogy, which (absent some controversial assumptions that Craig doesn't endorse) an analogy with the *Winged Victory*, *Venus de Milo*, and*David*, or with seated, standing, and reclining Socrates wouldn't be. But perhaps the idea is that these are better than the statue – lump analogy, or an analogy with seated Socrates and Socrates himself because these, rather than the constitution analogies, at least respect the *separateness* of the persons.

In Chapter 16, Christopher Hughes surveys a variety of different views, but focuses the majority of his critical attention on relative identity solutions. Against the pure relative identity solution, he notes that the doctrine of relative identity is both highly counterintuitive and difficult to motivate (since, on his

view, all of the alleged examples of relative identity can be accommodated without the supposition that identity is relative). Against the constitution view, he takes issue with Brower and Rea's claims about how to count material objects and how to count Gods – claims which do important work in allowing us to say that there is just one material object in cases of material constitution and just one God in the case of the Trinity. According to Hughes, principles like "If there are more Fs than Gs, then not every G is an F" are highly intuitive and in direct conflict with Brower and Rea's suggestions about how to count material objects and Gods. Moreover, on his view, such principles can be defended by appeal to our commonsense counting practices – precisely the sorts of practices (albeit different examples thereof) that Brower and Rea take to undergird their own view. So, for example, Hughes invites us to consider a sweater that has been knitted out of a piece of yarn, and to imagine someone asking: "Which is your favorite material object: the sweater or the piece of yarn?" On his view, there is nothing confused about articulating a preference in response to this question, as there *would* be if the sweater really were the same *material object* as the piece of yarn. Attention to examples like these, he thinks, provides strong support for the claim that different hylomorphic compounds are likewise different material objects.

Finally, Alexander Pruss (Chapter 17) offers sympathetic criticism of the constitution view. After making some initial observations and raising some questions about the "Aristotelian" pedigree of their account of material constitution, he turns to the substantive theological issues. He mentions concerns about what he sees as the inability of their view to account for sameness over **(p.14)** time, and he suggests that related objections may be alleviated via endorsement of four-dimensionalism. This concern, however, leads him to one that is more serious: this is the problem of numerical sameness across possible worlds. He notes that Brower and Rea might simply say that the proffered solution to the problem of material constitution is not meant to solve "transworld sameness" problems; they might simply say that this is a limit of the analogy – this is one more place where what is true of material objects is not true of God. But Pruss points out that their model loses some of its attractiveness if the analogy is weakened this way.

Pruss then proceeds to what is the most troubling of his concerns: he argues that although Brower and Rea do not embrace modalism, neither do they rule it out. He then proposes an amendment to their view, and he offers an alternative account that changes their model more drastically but brings it into alignment

with that of Aquinas.

## Philosophical and Systematic Theology

Oddly enough, contemporary systematic theologians have given far less attention to the "threeness–oneness" problem than have philosophical theologians. Despite the tremendous resurgence of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in contemporary theology, and despite the stark fact that the conversations forced upon Christian theologians by adherents of other world religions will make avoidance of this issue both impossible and irresponsible, up to this point many systematic (or constructive) theologians have been focused on other issues. Moreover, they often pay little attention to the work of analytic philosophers of religion. The essays by Alan Padgett (Chapter 18) and Thomas McCall (19) explore some related issues, and they seek to bring the work of the theologians and that of the philosophers into closer conversation.

Padgett argues that theologians should take seriously – and benefit from – the work being done by analytic philosophers of religion, but that they should not take it *too* seriously. He argues that "it is in consideration of the coherence of the orthodox and biblical doctrine of the Trinity that philosophy can be of the most use to theology," and that theologians ought to work more closely with philosophers in an effort to help "bring clarity to Christian thought" (p. 331). Against those who would argue that proper appreciation of the transcendence of God should lead us to reject the quest for clarity, Padgett argues that divine transcendence guarantees that *full* understanding of the divine nature is impossible, but it hardly guarantees that God cannot be understood by us at all. To the extent that he can be, Padgett thinks, we should want what we say and believe about God to be as clear and coherent as possible. Nevertheless, Padgett argues, respect for divine transcendence and acknowledgment of the fact that divine revelation is a more authoritative source of evidence in theology than rational intuition ought to leave us rather tentative in our adherence to any philosophical model of (say) **(p.15)** the Trinity. It is in just this sense that the work of philosophers is not to be taken *too* seriously by theologians.

In the final essay, Thomas McCall also identifies ways in which systematic theological accounts might be assisted by the work of the philosophers. He then addresses some of what he takes to be the main objections raised by the theologians against the philosophical treatments of the doctrine. He concludes with a call for both the philosophers and the theologians to listen to one another – even when it requires patience and hard work – and to labor together toward a

common goal. **(p.16)**

Notes:

(1) See, for example, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Michel René Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237–50, and “De Regnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51–80; Sarah Coakley, “‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion,” in Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins (eds.), *The Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 123–44; and Richard Cross, “Two Models of the Trinity?” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 275–94. See also Richard Cross's contribution to the present volume (Ch. 11).

(2) Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 22.

(3) Among the most widely cited defenders of ST are David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985); William Lane Craig, “Toward a Tenable Social Trinitarianism,” reprinted as Ch. 5 of this volume; Cornelius Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” “Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity,” *Thomist* 50 (1986): 325–52, and “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 37–53; Richard Swinburne, “The Trinity,” reprinted as Ch. 2 of this volume; and Edward Wierenga, “Trinity and Polytheism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 281–94.

(4) Plantinga's version seems to rely upon (Rb), (Rc), (Rd), and likely (Re).

(5) Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 2.

(6) Swinburne, *The Christian God*, p. 180.

(7) Swinburne, *The Christian God*, pp. 180–81.

(8) See, e.g., Jeffrey Brower, “The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: A Reply to Wierenga,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 295–303; Kelly James Clark, “Trinity or Tritheism?” *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 463–76; Edward Feser,

“Swinburne's Tritheism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 42 (1997): 175–84; Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” reprinted as Ch. 4 of this volume; and Dale Tuggy, “The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing,” *Religious Studies* 39 (2003): 165–83 and “Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 269–87. See also Michael Rea, “Polytheism and Christian Belief,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (2006): 133–48.

(9) Dale Tuggy, “The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing,” pp. 170–71. See also Tuggy, “Divine Deception”.

(10) Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” below, p. 000.

(11) For a defense of STagainst some of Leftow's charges (though not a full defense and certainly not an endorsement of all versions of ST), see Tom McCall, “Social Trinity and Tritheism Again: A Response to Brian Leftow,” *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003): 405–30.

(12) “Modes without Modalism,” in Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (eds.), *Persons: Human and Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 357–75.

(13) Leftow, “Modes without Modalism,” p. 367.

(14) Leftow, “Modes without Modalism,” p. 374.

(15) Leftow, “Modes Without Modalism,” p. 375.

(16) See P. T. Geach, “Identity,” *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967): 3–12, reprinted in *Logic Matters*(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972); *Reference and Generality*, 3rd edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), esp. sections 30, 34, and 110; and Nicholas Griffin, *Relative Identity*(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

(17) See Martinich, “Identity and Trinity,” *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978): 169–81, and “God, Emperor, and Relative Identity,” *Franciscan Studies* 39 (1979): 180–91. Besides Peter van Inwagen (Ch. 12 of this volume), other defenders of the relative identity strategy (pure and impure) include James Cain, “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Logic of Relative Identity,” *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 141–52, and G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), esp. pp. 118–20. Brower and Rea count as both critics and proponents, since they reject one way of deploying the

strategy but endorse another. (See Chs. 13 and 14 of this volume.) For other criticism, see Richard Cartwright, “On the Logical Problem of the Trinity,” in his *Philosophical Essays*(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 187–200; Trenton Merricks, “Split Brains and the Godhead,” in Thomas Crisp et al. (eds.), *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2006), and Dale Tuggy, “The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing.”

# Part I

# Social Trinitarianism and its Discontents

# The Trinity

**Richard Swinburne**

Given the doctrine of God developed in the last two chapters [of *The Christian God*, not reproduced here], what follows concerning the two affirmations about God's nature—that he is 'three persons in one substance', the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; and that he became incarnate in Jesus Christ, 'true God and true man'? In this chapter I shall explore the meaning and coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity, and in the process develop an a priori argument for the necessity of that doctrine, to back up the argument from revelation for its truth.

## Could There be More Than one Divine Individual?

I considered in the last chapter [of *The Christian God*] two issues about the divine nature which turned on the issue of which of two rival hypotheses was the simpler, and so had greater prior probability—whether the necessity of a divine individual is metaphysical or ontological; and whether such an individual has thisness. I came down firmly in favour of the view that the divine necessity was metaphysical rather than ontological, and marginally in favour of the view that a divine individual does not have thisness.

Which view one takes on these issues is crucially relevant to the question to which we come at last, of whether there can be more than one divine individual. A divine individual who exists of ontological necessity would be such that there is no cause active or permissive of his existence at any time. But, if he is the creator and sustainer of any universe there may be, any other substance can only exist if he is, at least in part, the cause of its existence. Hence there cannot be, beside an onto-logically necessary divine being, another such.

But what if the necessity of a divine individual is understood as metaphysical necessity? We suggested in Chapter 7 [of *The Christian God*] that being divine should be understood as entailing and being entailed by being necessarily perfectly free, omniscient, omnipotent, and existing of metaphysical necessity. Now there certainly could be two or more individuals who were necessarily perfectly free, and omniscient. The latter property, it will be recalled from Chapter 6 [of **(p.20)** *The Christian God*], is construed as knowledge of all that is logically possible for the individual to know and so does not include knowledge of the future actions of free agents.

The problem arises with omnipotence. Could there be two omnipotent

individuals who existed of metaphysical necessity (i.e. everlastingly, and uncaused or inevitably caused by a backwardly everlasting uncaused substance)?

As I argued in Chapter 6 [of *The Christian God*], an omniscient and perfectly free individual will always be perfectly good. I spelled this out as follows. I understand all the acts which an individual can do simultaneously as one possible act available to such an individual. Then a perfectly good individual will act as follows. He will do no bad act, and where there is a unique best act, he will do it. Where there are equal best acts he will do one of them; and where there is a best kind of act, but no best of the kind but rather an infinite number of acts each no less good than another act, he will do one act of that kind. Otherwise his perfect goodness does not restrict how he will act. I called the acts that such an individual does and has to do in virtue of his perfect goodness—for instance, the best act in the circumstances if there is one—acts of essence; and the acts which he does but does not have to do, despite his perfect goodness, acts of will. These latter are acts between which he chooses, and between which no balance of reason dictates how he will choose. A divine individual's compatibilist power is his omnipotence, the power to do anything logically possible, if he so chooses; his absolute power is the power to choose and do, and that is limited not merely by logical possibility but by perfect goodness.

So could there be two omnipotent individuals having also the previously cited divine properties? An initial gut reaction is ‘No’. Would not the omnipotence of one such individual be subject to frustration by the other individual and so not be omnipotence? Not in general—for the omnipotence of such an individual, being also perfectly good, is only the power to do good actions within ranges of the kind available to a perfectly good being. Each individual would be bringing about many good states, within himself, in relation to the other individual, and creating and sustaining without. Since each would recognize the other as having the divine properties, including perfect goodness, it is plausible to suppose that each would recognize a duty not to prevent or frustrate the acts of the other, to use his omnipotence to forward them rather than frustrate them. If the second individual creates a universe which the first individual by himself would not have chosen to create, there would be wrong in the first individual attempting to prevent or frustrate this creative work; on the contrary, it would be good that he should give it his backing.

The only possibility of conflict between the acts of individuals with the above properties would arise where each tried to do an act compatible with his perfect goodness but incompatible with the act which the other was trying

simultaneously to do. Thus, it might be an equally good event that Abraham be called by a divine individual to settle in Iraq as that he be called to settle in Iran, and thus there might be before both divine individuals two equally good possible acts. One might try to perform the one, and the other the other. Or (if we call the present **(p.21)** direction of revolution of the Earth round the Sun clockwise) it might be equally good that the Earth revolve anticlockwise as that it revolve clockwise, and thus again there might be before both divine individuals two equally good possible acts of bringing about these states of affairs. One might choose the one and the other the other. There could not be two divine individuals unless there was some mechanism to prevent interference and the mechanism could not limit their power in the compatibilist sense, only in the absolute sense (by making it no longer good to do acts of a certain sort). It could do that only by there being something which made it a bad thing for each to act in an area where the other was operative, for instance, an agreement between them not to do so. But how are the lines of distribution of the proper exercise of power to be drawn up? By one divine individual? But there is nothing to guarantee that at the moment at which he draws up a proposal for distributing power, the other divine individual might not draw up a different proposal; and even with the best will in the world, only luck could prevent an actual collision of wills. (Compare the situation where two people are approaching each other along a pavement, and each tries to move to that side of the pavement where he guesses the other will not go; they may or may not collide.) Only if one lays down what the rules are, and his decision is accepted because he has the authority to lay down the rules, will the collision necessarily be avoided. But a difference in authority would have to arise from some other difference of status between the divine individuals; in some way one would have to be the source of being of the other. And for other reasons it surely must be that if there are two divine individuals, one is the ultimate source of being. As I suggested in Chapter 6, arguments to the existence of God derive their force from their ability to explain the orderly complexity of our world as deriving from a single source of being. To suppose that there were two or more ultimate sources of being, neither of which was dependent on the other, would be to make a suggestion contrary to what is indicated by arguments for the existence of God.

As I showed in Chapter 6—if there can be more than one divine individual, one divine individual can derive his existence from another divine individual, so long as the derivation is inevitable. For each of two divine individuals $G_1$ and $G_2$, it can be the case that there is no cause of it existing at any time while it exists, neither active cause nor permissive cause, except (directly or indirectly) an

uncaused and backwardly everlasting substance, namely a divine individual, who causes his existence inevitably in virtue of his properties. If $G_1$, inevitably in virtue of his properties throughout some first (beginningless) period of time actively causes $G_2$ to exist, and thereafter permissively causes (i.e. permits) the continued existence of $G_2$; while $G_2$ is such that $G_1$ only exists at each period of time which has a beginning because $G_2$ permits $G_1$ to exist, then both would be metaphysically necessary—once existent, they inevitably always exist, and there is no time at which they do not exist. The eternal (active and then permissive) bringing about of $G_2$ by $G_1$ would be an act of essence by $G_1$, just as the (permissive) bringing about of $G_1$ by $G_2$ would be an act of essence by $G_2$; and the former would provide a mechanism by which to ensure that there was no conflict of action between them. For $G_1$would prescribe what the mechanism **(p.22)** was. The same will hold in the simpler case with which I will work henceforward, that $G_1$ is everlastingly (inevitably in virtue of his properties) the active cause of $G_2$; while $G_2$ is for every period of time which has a beginning (inevitably in virtue of his properties) the permissive cause of $G_1$.

There are many different ways in which unity of action can be secured among individuals who might otherwise impede each other's efforts. One of them could take all the decisions and the others simply execute those decisions. Another way is to have a vote on every issue and for each then to carry out the result of the vote. A third way is to have a division of functions. One individual takes decisions on certain kinds of issues, and the others support him in these. Another individual takes decisions on other issues, and the others support him in those, and so on. Which would be the best way for divine individuals to secure unity of action, to determine a choice between alternatives equally available to a perfectly good individual? The first way would seem an imperfect way of sharing power between divine individuals, and so one which $G_1$ would not adopt. The second way, taken strictly, is not a possible way when there are only two individuals, for, unless chance produces a prior coincidence of their views, votes will always be tied. (Marriage cannot be a democracy.) And even where there are more than two individuals, but many alternative actions (such that there is no overriding reason for doing one rather than another), is there any reason to suppose that there will often be a majority in favour of one course of action? Only the third way would seem a viable way of securing unity of action in shared power among divine individuals.

Such unity of action could be secured if the first individual solemnly vows to the second individual in causing his existence that he will not initiate any act (of will) in a certain sphere of activity that he allocates to him, while at the same time the first individual requests the second individual not to initiate any such act outside that sphere. The vow of the first individual would create an obligation on him not to initiate any act (of will) within the second individual's allocated sphere of activity. So, although the first divine individual retains his omnipotence, it is, as before, limited by his inability to do other than what is perfectly good, and in virtue of his promise this limitation will ensure that he does not frustrate the actions of the second divine individual. Conversely, although all power is given to the second individual, it comes with a request that it should not be exercised in a certain way. The overall goodness of conformity to that request (not to conform would be not to conform to a reasonable request from the source of his being and power) will ensure that, although omnipotent, the second individual cannot frustrate any action of the first individual. The sharing of divinity could (logically) only occur subject to some restriction preventing mutual impediment of action. I have presented a highly fallible human judgement as to what the best such mechanism (and so the one which would be adopted) would be.

Each of the postulated divine individuals would be omnipotent in the sense that each could at any period of time do anything logically possible—for example, bring it about that the Earth moves round the Sun in a clockwise direction. But the **(p.23)** omnipotence of each individual is limited by his perfect goodness, and if one individual has promised the other individual that he will not perform actions (when there is not a unique best action) in this area (e.g. the area of movements of heavenly bodies), then his perfect goodness limits his omnipotence so that he does not do such an act. Thus each of two individuals with the earlier divine properties can be omnipotent.[1] (I repeat my warning from the last chapter with respect to such phrases as that ‘perfect goodness limits omnipotence’. Talk of one property ‘limiting’ another only arises when we divide the property of being divine into such constituent properties as we humans can best grasp. The ‘limit’ is a limit on the application of a human word to God; it is not to be understood as a constraint within a divine individual.)

So there can be more than one divine individual if it is necessary that the first divine individual brings about the existence of a second divine individual. It is possible that there be more than one divine individual only if it is necessary that there be more than one divine individual. But since nothing affects how a divine

individual acts except reason, this can only be if the first divine individual has an overriding reason to bring about the existence of a second individual, that is, he brings this about as an act of essence.

I have talked only of a second divine individual. But similar arguments will obviously show that there can be a third divine individual only if it is necessary that there be a third divine individual, and that will be only if the first divine individual, or the second individual, or both together, have overriding reason for bringing about (everlastingly, or for an initial beginningless period) the third individual. If there is such overriding reason, then one way in which this could come about is if the first divine individual in bringing about the second individual requests him to confine his acts of will to a narrower Weld of activity, and one or the other or both together then bring about the existence of the third divine individual, with both divine individuals undertaking not to initiate acts of will in a certain sphere and requesting the third individual to confine his acts of will to that sphere. Such requests and undertakings would again limit the absolute power of each individual, but not the compatibilist power.

But now there is a problem which arises if divine individuals have thisness. I shall consider shortly how it can be that there is overriding reason to bring about another divine individual. But if there is such a reason, and if divine individuals have thisness, then there has to be overriding reason to bring about*this* second divine individual rather than any other one. For only if there was, would the individual brought about be a metaphysically necessary being. If it was equally good for the first divine individual to bring about this second individual or that, then bringing about this one rather than that one would be an act of will rather than an act of essence, and so the individual brought about would not have the metaphysical necessity of the first individual. But a reason for bringing about this individual rather than that one would consist in one having an essential property that the other lacked. Yet if divine individuals have thisness, there will always be **(p.24)** possible divine individuals which have the same essential properties (those essential to divinity and any further individuating properties), and so no reason for bringing about one rather than another. Nor could there be reason for bringing about all possible divine individuals (even all ones having the same individuating properties). For there could be no set of such individuals; there would be no ‘all’—however many divine individuals were caused to exist (even an infinite continuum of such), there would still be infinitely more which could be caused to exist. If divine individuals have thisness, there cannot be reason to bring about one rather than another. Hence if divine individuals have

thisness, there can only be one of them.

If, however, divine individuals do not have thisness, and are individuated solely by further properties beyond those essential to divinity, there is no problem. We saw in Chapter 7 [of *The Christian God*] that these properties would have to be properties of relation between the divine individuals, and the argument of this chapter suggests that they will have to be properties of causal relation. Divine individuals will have to differ in the way in which they are mutually dependent on each other. And so any sole divine individual brought about by the first divine individual would be the same as any other such. For the property of being so brought about is a property necessarily possessed by that divine individual (i.e. the one who has continuity of experience with such a caused individual)—he could not exist otherwise. Contrariwise, the first divine individual would be uniquely identified as the uncaused one in the sense of the one who had no active cause of his existence. Since the mere act of bringing about a divine individual would necessarily bring about the same divine individual, there is no issue of a need for reason to bring about this divine individual rather than that one. A third divine individual could only be different from the second if he had different relational properties, and so if the active cause of his existence was different from that of the second individual. The only way in which this could happen would be if he were actively co-caused by the first and second individuals.[2] The preceding argument makes the distinction between divine individuals in terms of how they are caused. But this distinction entails a corresponding distinction in terms of what they cause. The first divine individual is one who actively causes another divine individual and, in co-operation with him, a third divine individual. The second divine individual is the one who actively causes the only one further divine individual and that in co-operation with another divine individual. The third divine individual is he who is the active cause of existence (either by himself or in co-operation) of no other individual.

So is there overriding reason for a first divine individual to bring about a second or third or fourth such? I believe that there is overriding reason for a first divine individual to bring about a second divine individual and with him to bring about a third divine individual, but no reason to go further. If the Christian religion has helped us, Christians and non-Christians, to see anything about what is worthwhile, it has helped us to see that love is a supreme good. Love involves **(p.25)** sharing, giving to the other what of one's own is good for him and receiving from the other what of his is good for one; and love involves co-operating with another to benefit third parties. This latter is crucial for

worthwhile love. There would be something deeply unsatisfactory (even if for inadequate humans sometimes unavoidable) about a marriage in which the parties were concerned solely with each other and did not use their mutual love to bring forth good to others, for example by begetting, nourishing, and educating children, but possibly in other ways instead. Love must share and love must co-operate in sharing.[3] The best love would share all that it had. A divine individual would see that for him too a best kind of action would be to share and to co-operate in sharing. Now a first divine individual is such that but for his choice there would be none other with whom to share. So the love of a first divine individual $G_1$ would be manifested first in bringing about another divine individual $G_2$ with whom to share his life, and the love of $G_1$ or $G_2$ would be manifested in bringing about another divine individual $G_3$ with whom $G_1$ and $G_2$ co-operatively could share their lives. $G_2$ and $G_3$ would then (i.e. for every period of time which had a beginning) co-operate in allowing $G_1$ to continue in being, for, but for their action, there would be no $G_1$.[4] But their action would be an inevitable action, an act of essence; the power not to keep $G_1$ in being would be only compatibilist power, not absolute power. (The love of the first and second individuals might be manifested in an initial active causing and thereafter permissive causing, or in an everlasting active causing. The same consequences of everlasting mutually sustaining coexistence of divine individuals follow on either supposition.) All three would go on to co-operate further in backing (i.e. putting their causal power behind) the activities of each other in their respective spheres of activity.[5]

**(p.26)** If divine individuals can thus multiply, why should not the process continue further? The reason why it was an overall good that the first divine individual should bring about the second was that otherwise there would be none with whom to share totally; and the reason why it was an overall good that the first and second divine individuals should bring about a third was that otherwise there would be no one with whom to co-operate in sharing totally. But that argument does not provide a reason for any more bringing about. In allowing the other divine individuals to exercise sovereignty in a certain area, and thus backing that sovereignty with his own sovereignty, each gives and co-operates in sharing. But if giving and co-operating in sharing are overriding goods, why not co-operating with two others in sharing? My ethical intuitions are inevitably highly fallible here, but it seems to me that co-operating with two others in sharing is not essential to the manifestation of love so long as co-operating with

one in sharing is going on. There is a qualitative difference between sharing and co-operating in sharing, and hence overriding reason for divine acts of both kinds; but, as it seems to me, no similar qualitative difference between co-operating with one in sharing and cooperating with two. So one divine individual (or two or three such together) could not create a fourth as an act of essence. But no divine individual could create another divine individual as act of will. For any being created by an act of will might (metaphysically) not have existed, and so could not be divine.

I conclude (tentatively) that necessarily if there is at least one divine individual, and if it is logically possible that there be more than one divine individual, then there are three and only three divine individuals. The logical possibility seems to exist if there exists one divine individual with metaphysical but not ontological necessity, and if divine individuals lack thisness. Otherwise there is no possibility of there being more than one divine individual. I have presented a priori arguments why one might expect a divine individual to have only metaphysical necessity and to lack thisness, but those arguments can hardly be regarded as other than balance of probability arguments.

## The Traditional Doctrine

If my two conditions on divine individuals—that a divine individual has metaphysical but not ontological necessity, and lacks thisness—are satisfied, and also my moral intuitions about the overriding goodness of different kinds of causing existence are correct, then there follows the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity, understood in a certain way. This doctrine was first stated in credal form in the Nicene Creed promulgated by the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, and famously captured in the Athanasian Creed, a late document of perhaps the sixth century AD.

This doctrine involves the claim that there is only one God, but three divine individuals, each of whom is God; and whether that follows from my account depends on how ‘there is only one God’ and ‘each divine individual is God’ are to **(p.27)** be understood. If ‘there is only one God’ meant ‘there is only one divine individual’, then the doctrine of the Trinity would be manifestly self-contradictory. So clearly Church councils in affirming both must have understood ‘there is only one God’ in a somewhat subtler sense—since no person and no Council affirming something which they intend to be taken with utter seriousness can be read as affirming an *evident* contradiction. What, in denying tritheism, the view that there are three Gods, were Councils ruling out? I

suggest that they were denying that there were three ,*independent* divine beings, any of which could exist without the other; or which could act independently of each other.[6]

On the account which I have given, the three divine individuals taken together would form a collective source of the being of all other things; the members would be totally mutually dependent and necessarily jointly behind each other's acts. This collective would be indivisible in its being for logical reasons—that is, the kind of being that it would be is such that each of its members is necessarily everlasting, and would not have existed unless it had brought about or been brought about by the others. The collective would also be indivisible in its causal action in the sense that each would back totally the causal action of the others.[7] The collective would be causeless and so (in my sense), unlike its members, ontologically necessary, not dependent for its existence on anything outside itself. It is they, however, rather than it, who, to speak strictly, would have the divine properties of omnipotence, omniscience, etc.; though clearly there is a ready and natural sense in which the collective can be said to have them as well. If all members of a group know something, the group itself, by a very natural extension of use, can be said to know that thing;[8] and so on. Similarly this very strong unity of the collective would make it, as well as its individual members, an appropriate object of worship.[9] The claim that 'there is only one God' is to be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity.

But then how is the claim that each of the individuals is 'God' to be understood? Simply as the claim that each is divine—omnipotent, perfectly good, etc. Each such being would be an all-perfect source of all things—what more could councils intelligibly mean by that claim that an individual is God? On this reading, unavoidable if we are to make any sense of the creeds, 'there is one God' is to be read in such a way that '*a* is God' and '*b* is God' and 'there is only one God' do not entail '*a* = *b*'. There is an ambiguity in the Greek and Latin of the **(p.28)** creeds, which justifies a different understanding of θεός and *deus*(normally both translated into English as 'God') in different places in the creeds. Both words may function either as a predicate meaning 'a god' (a divine individual, in some sense of 'divine' without any implication of uniqueness) or as a referring expression 'God' (being either the proper name or the definite description of the, in some sense, unique Supreme Being). Latin does not have a definite article and so *deus* may mean either 'a god' or 'the god', and if it means the latter, divinity amounts to a lot more than it does in the former case. And

although Greek does have a definite article (ὁ), it may not always be used when uniqueness is assumed, and θεός by itself may be ‘a god’, ‘God’, or even function as an adjective (‘divine’, often then translated into Latin by *divus*). Given this ambiguity, it is not implausible to read the creeds as asserting that three divine individuals (in my sense) together constitute one God (in my sense). The creeds are less paradoxical in Greek or Latin than their English translation makes them.

On this understanding of what the creeds mean by saying that there is one God (θεός, *deus*) but three individuals who are each ‘God’ (i.e. divine, θεός, *deus*), the rest of their claims about the Trinity follow straightforwardly from my account. The individuals are said to be *hypostases* (ὑποστάσεις), that is, individuals, or *personae* (πρόσωπα); a *persona* is simply a rational individual —‘person’ in the sense described in Chapter 1 [of *The Christian God*].[10] As it follows from my argument that there will be, so there is, according to the creeds, a difference between the persons in respect of which depends on which and also in respect of function, and the traditional names bring out both of these aspects of the differences. Traditionally, the first divine individual is called ‘Father’, the second ‘Son’ (or ‘Word’), the third ‘Spirit’. ‘Father’ seems a name appropriate to the original source. Both ‘Son’ and ‘Word’ suggest a second or third divine individual. Biblical tradition apportions both these names to Christ, and if the second person of the Trinity became incarnate, they are then appropriate names for that second person. Apart from insisting that the second person of the Trinity alone became incarnate, the early church had no very clear view about which members of the Trinity did what,[11] although the name of ‘Spirit’ derived from many biblical sources was often recognized as giving the third individual a primary role in sanctification. Later centuries saw the earlier confusion about who did what as reinforcing a view that all three were at work in each divine act[12]—which does **(p.29)** follow from my account in the form that any act of each is backed by the others. My arguments do, however, suggest a different primary role for each (in areas where reason does not dictate a unique action). But I have no arguments beyond any deriving from biblio-ecclesiastical tradition for tying the members of the Trinity defined by their relative dependences with any particular roles.

If the second person of the Trinity is to be called ‘Son’ an obvious name for the kind of way in which the Father brings him about is ‘begets’. Early church theologians and scholastics thought of ‘creates’ as applicable only to the bringing about of something finite by an act of will, and so they avoided that word for the

bringing about within the Trinity. ‘Made’ for them meant made out of some pre-existing matter. Hence their wish for a new word; but they were careful in all expositions of its meaning to explain that ‘begetting’ connoted no sexual process, a fact made clear by there being no other ‘parent’ beside the Father. Since there is a difference in the mode of dependence of Son on Father from that of Spirit on Son and Father, since the dependence is on two rather than on one, and results from the overriding goodness of co-operation in sharing rather than the overriding goodness of sharing itself, Church councils gave a different name to the mode of origin of Spirit from Father and Son—‘proceeding’. (Avoiding the word ‘begotten’ for this process of dependence on two does have the additional advantage of avoiding the obvious analogy for the second divine individual of ‘mother’, which would make the assumption that some sort of sexual process was involved in the origin of the Spirit almost unavoidable.) Augustine expresses agnosticism about the nature of the difference between ‘begetting’ and ‘proceeding’.[13] Aquinas uses a different terminology so that ‘proceeding’ is a generic name for what results from both bringings about, ‘begetting’ is the species of bringing about which applies to the Father/Son case, and he hesitantly suggests a word ‘spirating’ to cover the bringing about of the Holy Spirit.[14] He also insists there is a difference between the two bring-ings about but can tell us little more about it. I have tried to say a little more about wherein it must consist, namely, simply in dependence on two co-causes as opposed to dependence on one cause. That the difference between ‘begetting’ and ‘proceeding’ consists simply in this was the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa in the later fourth century:

> That is the only way by which we distinguish one Person from the other, by believing, that is, that one is the cause and the other depends on the cause. Again, we recognize another distinction with regard to that which depends on the cause. There is that which depends on the first cause and that which is derived from what immediately depends on the first cause. Thus the attribute of being only-begotten without doubt remains with the Son, and we do not question that the Spirit is derived from the Father. For the mediation of the Son, while **(p.30)** it guards his prerogative of being only-begotten, does not exclude the relation which the Spirit has by nature to the Father.[15]

The Western Church's version of the Nicene Creed asserts that the Spirit ‘proceeds from the Father and the Son’, whereas the original version preserved by the Eastern Church asserts that the Spirit proceeds ‘from the Father’, though

individual Eastern theologians taught that the procession from the Father is 'through the Son'.[16] It seems to me that the Western version brings out the fact, which alone on my argument could account for it, that the generation of the Spirit is a co-operative act.

The three individuals all have the same essence, that is, they are each of the same essential kind, namely, divine. The mutual dependence of the three persons is naturally called περτχώρησις, 'interpenetration' or 'coinherence'. In acting towards the outside world (i.e. in creating or sustaining other substances), although (unless there is a unique best action) one individual initiates any action, the initiating act (whether of active or permissive causation) is backed by the co-causation of the others—hence the slogan *omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* ('all the acts of the Trinity towards the outside world are indivisible'). (In consequence of such co-causation, I shall often continue to write of 'God' doing this or that, except where it is important to bring out which member of the Trinity initiates such action.) But within the Trinity there must be, I argued, some asymmetry of dependence—God the Father is not caused to exist actively by the Son or Spirit. He is in this sense uncaused, although throughout any period which has a beginning he is permitted to exist by the others. And there is inevitably a similar asymmetry of dependence for each of the others.[17] But since the Father had no option but to cause the Son, and Father and Son had no option but to cause the Spirit, and all exist eternally, the dependence of Son on Father, and of Spirit on Father and Son, does not diminish greatness. Each could not exist but as eternally causing or permitting the other or others to exist. A king who at some stage in his reign voluntarily shares his kingdom with another may well be thought to be greater than the other. But a king who for all his reign has to share his kingdom with another may reasonably be considered no greater than the other.

All of this is what we find in what the Nicene Creed has to say about the Trinity:

> We believe in one God (θες), the Father Almighty…and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, …true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance (ὁμοουσιός) with the Father…And in the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father [and the Son] who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified together.

**(p.31)** The Council of Nicaea declared the Son to be ὁμοουσιός with the Father. It may well have meant by that only that Father and Son were both (to use the

technical patristic term) ‘of the same second substance’, that is, both divine.[18] But a stronger understanding of ὁμοουσιός soon arose, to the effect that Father, Son, and Spirit were all ‘of the same first substance’, namely, in some sense formed the same individual thing. I have explained the sense in which that also is true. The words ‘and the Son’ (*filioque*) describing the source of the Spirit's procession were not originally in the Nicene Creed, but were added later to the Western version;[19] but, as I have noted, even the Eastern version seems to allow a certain asymmetry of dependence.

Likewise the account of the Trinity which I have derived fits in with what the Athanasian Creed has to say about it:

> the Catholic Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal…The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated…the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet there are not three eternals but one eternal…So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty…Like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge each Person by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say that there are three gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten but proceeding…In this Trinity none is before or after another, none is greater or less than another…He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

I derived the traditional formulas by reading the *deus* (θεός), which the Father, Son, and Spirit are each said to be, differently from the *deus* (θεός) which is used when it is said that there are not three *dei* but one *deus.* Unless we do this, it seems to me that the traditional formulas are self-contradictory. If we read all occurrences of *deus* as occurrences of the same referring expression, the Athanasian Creed then asserts that Father, Son, and Spirit are each of them the same individual thing, and also that they have different properties, for example, the Father begets but is not begotten. But that is not possible; if things are the

same, they must have all the same properties. Alternatively, if we read all occurrences as occurrences of the same predicate, attributing the same property, the Athanasian **(p.32)** Creed then claims that each of the three persons, which are not the same persons as each other, is divine; but there is only one divine thing which is a substance, God the Holy Trinity[20] But how can there be three divine things, and yet only one? Contradiction looms. There have been attempts to make sense of there being three divine persons, and yet only one divine substance, by means of the philosophical doctrine of relative identity, especially recently by Peter van Inwagen.[21] The reader will recall from Chapter 1 [of*The Christian God]* that a philosophical doctrine of relative identity claims that one thing, *a*, which is (Φ and ψ) may be the same Φ as *b* but not the same Φ as *b;* sameness is relative to the sortal (Φ or ψ). The sort of example the doctrine has in mind is that some statue may be the same statue as an earlier statue but not the same lump of brass as the earlier one (because the lump of brass has been gradually replaced in the interval by new brass formed into the same shape). Van Inwagen then claims analogously that 'substance' (which he equates with 'being'), 'God', and 'person' are sortal terms, such that the Father is the same substance, and so the same God, as the Son; but not the same person as the Son. Likewise the Spirit is the same substance and God as the Son, but not the same person. From this it follows that there are three persons, each of which is God, but only one God. Van Inwagen has developed a very rigorous formal logic of relative identity, which, he claims, prevents us from drawing any contradictions from statements such as these.

However, the philosophical objections to any doctrine of relative identity deployed in Chapter 1 [of*The Christian God]* remain. If 'the Father', 'the Son', and 'the Spirit' are to have clear uses, then each must have associated with it a substance-sortal (or more than one sortal, so long as the sortals carve up the world in the same way); they cannot have sortals associated with them which diverge in their subsequent applications. If 'the Father' is the name of a person who is not the same person as the Son or the Spirit, then it cannot also be the name of a God (or a substance) who is the same God (or substance) as the Son and the Spirit.[22] And **(p.33)** if we deny that 'the Father' etc. do have clear uses, we deny any clear content to the doctrine of the Trinity at all.[23]

In AD 1215 The Fourth Lateran Council claimed firmly, in purported refutation of the views of Joachim of Fiore, that the unity of the Godhead was not just a collective unity 'in the way that many human beings are said to make one people, and many believers one church'. Rather it is the same 'thing', 'that is

divine substance, essence or nature' which 'truly is the Father, and is the Son, and is the Spirit', 'That thing is not begetting, nor begotten, nor proceeding, but is the Father who begets, and the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds, so that there may be distinction of persons but unity of nature.'[24] These expressions can certainly be read in such a way as to be claiming that there are three divine individuals and each is the same substance (in my sense), leading to the clear contradiction from which the doctrine of relative identity cannot help us to escape. It is so read if we read the *res*, 'thing', which is said to be 'substance' (*substantia*) as *a* substance in my sense. But if 'substance' just means 'essence' or 'nature', as the Council glosses it, then there is *a* way of reading what it said along the lines which I have developed in this chapter. We saw in the previous chapter [of *The Christian God]* that there was a sense in which a divine individual is his essence, namely, that he lacks thisness—there is nothing more to a divine individual than the instantiation of the divine essence and any further individuating relational properties (e.g. 'being begotten'). Hence what the Council *may* be saying is this: the Godhead is not just three individuals, each with its thisness, who have common essential properties. Rather, it is exactly the instantiation of the same essence of divinity which makes the Father God, as makes the Son God, as makes the Spirit God. They would be the same individual but for the relational properties which are distinct from the divine essence and which distinguish them.[25]

**(p.34)** Articulations in the Christian tradition of the doctrine of the Trinity are often distinguished into forms of social Trinitarianism that stress the separateness of the persons, and forms of relative Trinitarianism that stress the unity of the Godhead. What I have expounded is, I suppose, a moderate form of social Trinitarianism but one which stresses both the logical inseparability of the divine persons in the Trinity, and the absence of anything by which the persons of the Trinity are individuated except their relational properties.[26]

The reason which I have given for why a divine individual must give rise to another and hence a third, that goodness is essentially diffusive and generous, was, I believe, implicitly or explicitly, at the heart of the thinking of many of those of early centuries who advocated the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Of course the biblical texts had enormous influence, yet on their own they could have given rise to a hundred different theologies. Certainly emanations and trinities formed part of the common stock of religious ideas current in the Mediterranean of the first centuries ad, but these ideas took many different forms, and there were other ideas around. So why did Christians choose to see in

the biblical texts Trinitarianism of the kind which subsequently became the orthodoxy? The answer is, I think, this. They had two basic convictions. One was that our complex and orderly universe derived its being from a single personal source of being, possessed of all perfection. The other was that perfection includes perfect love. There is something profoundly imperfect and therefore inadequately divine in a solitary divine individual. If such an individual is love, he must share, and sharing with finite beings such as humans is not sharing all of one's nature and so is imperfect sharing. A divine individual's love has to be manifested in a sharing with another divine individual, and that (to keep the divine unity) means (in some sense) within the godhead, that is, in mutual dependence and support.

Augustine made the remark with respect to the Father generating an equal, *Si voluit et non potuit, infirmus est; si potuit et non voluit, invidus est:* 'if he wished to and could not, he is weak; if he could but did not wish to, he is envious'.[27] But for explicit a priori argument of the kind which I have given as to why there need to be three and only three divine individuals, we have to wait for Richard of **(p.35)** St Victor in the twelfth century. In De Trinitate he developed the points both that perfect love involves there being someone else to whom to be generous; and also that perfect loving involves a third individual, the loving of whom could be shared with the second. The Father needs *socium et condilectum* (an ally and one fellow-loved) in his loving.[28] Richard also gives what are in effect two further arguments for the necessary bringing about of a third divine individual—that anyone who really loves will seek the good of the beloved both by finding someone else for him to love and (by the same act) finding someone else for him to be loved by. That demand too will be fully satisfied by three persons. Other medievals echoed Richard's views, often quoting him by name.[29]

Aquinas claims that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be known by natural reason,[30] but only by revelation; and he then goes on to explain (in effect) that while sound deductive arguments from evident data can be given for the existence of God, only somewhat weak inductive arguments can be given for the Trinity.[31] My own view, and that of many, is that Aquinas has overestimated the capacity of human reason with respect to the existence of God. Only fairly strong inductive arguments can be given for the existence of God.[32] Given that, arguments for there being a God and God being 'three persons in one substance' will be of the same kind. My claim is that the data which suggest that there is a God suggest that the most probable kind of God is such that inevitably he becomes tripersonal. It is for this reason that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a

more complicated hypothesis than the hypothesis of a sole divine individual; the simplest sort of God to whom arguments lead inevitably tripersonalizes, to coin a word. If some simple hypothesis put forward by a scientist to explain complex data entails some further complex consequences, that makes it no less simple—especially if there can be other evidence for those consequences.

The Christian revelation teaches the doctrine of the Trinity as a central element of its creeds. Any evidence from the circumstances of its origin that that revelation is true[33] confirms the doctrine of the Trinity; just as any a priori grounds for supposing the doctrine of the Trinity to be true is evidence that the Christian revelation (and so any elements it contains) is true. What I have presented as a priori a marginally more probable account of the divine nature than any other, becomes enormously more probable if backed up by revelation.

## (p.36) Additional Notes

1. The medieval theologians wanted to claim, in accord with Christian orthodoxy, both that there is only one God and that there are ‘three divine persons’. Various of the arguments which they gave for the former seem to me to be such that if they worked they would also refute the latter. However, they seem to me not to work. Richard of St Victor has the simple argument that there could be no more than one (essentially) omnipotent being, because then one could deprive the other of omnipotence—De *Trinitate*, 1.25. He does not recognize the point that such an act would be bad, and that for quite other reasons omnipotence must be construed in such a way as to rule out the possibility of God doing a bad act. Duns Scotus has a more subtle argument against the possibility of more than one (essentially) omnipotent being of the kind which I used in connection with the example of Abraham above—‘if two omnipotent beings exist, each will make the other impotent, not indeed by destroying the other, but because one by his positive will could keep non-existent what the other wills should exist’. Interestingly he goes on to suggest that his opponent might suggest ‘sophistically’, ‘that they voluntarily agree on a common way of acting through some sort of pact’, but claims that the result of the pact would be to leave neither of them omnipotent. But he does not see the point that to break a pact would be a wrong act; and that God's omnipotence must be construed in such a way as to rule out the possibility of his doing wrong. See Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1. d2. q3; trans. A. Wolter,*Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings* (Hackett Publishing Co.,

1987), 90.
2. There is a possible compromise position between the view that divine individuals have thisness with the consequence that there can only be one of them, and the view that they do not have thisness with the consequence that there can be more than one of them— the view that either alternative is a logical possibility; that divine individuals can have or lack thisness. In that case the first divine individual could have thisness, but it would remain the case that subsequent divine individuals could not have thisness —for there would be no reason to bring about this second divine individual rather than that one. Yet subsequent divine individuals could have as essential individuating properties not merely general relational properties (e.g. 'being caused by a divine individual') but particular relational properties (e.g. 'being caused by this divine individual'). The thisness of the first divine individual would then be what constituted the individuality of subsequent divine individuals, and of the collective. This compromise view does then have the same consequences for the Trinity as those of the second view above, to be developed subsequently in this chapter. In some ways it is an attractive view. But against it are to be ranged first the objections at the end of Ch. 7 [of *The Christian God*] to divine individuals having thisness; and secondly the very strong objection that surely all individuals of the same kind must be individuated in the same sort of way. Two individuals could not both be divine if the sort of thing that constituted their individuality was totally different for each of them.
3. It is compatible with my philosophical argument that there must be an asymmetry of dependence between divine individuals, that it be either an asymmetry of causal dependence only for an initial (beginningless) period of time or an eternal one. In the first system the first divine individual actively causes the second and (with him) the third during an initial period. Subsequently each is only the permissive cause (i.e. permits the existence of) the others. In the second system the first divine **(p.37)** individual actively causes the second, and (with him) the third throughout all time. But for each period of time that has a beginning the first continues to exist only because the second and the third permit this, and the second continues to exist only because the third permits this. Which system will operate depends on which system there is most reason for divine individuals to bring about. In favour of the first, more limited, system of dependence is the argument that under it the first and second individuals would be, as it were, less stingy in handing over influence. In

favour of the second fuller system of dependence is the argument that since dependence is good, the more of it the better; and the first and second divine individuals would see that the best act would be one which maximized dependence. I hesitate to pronounce on which system reason favours most. That part of the Christian tradition that understands God being eternal as his being outside time will, of course, demand that all causal dependences that exist once exist always. But that part of the Christian tradition that understands God being eternal as his being everlasting would seem equally at home with either kind of asymmetry.

Notes:

(1) See Additional Note 1 [at the end of this Chapter].

(2) See Additional Note 2 [at the end of this Chapter].

(3) On ‘non-possessive love’ involving more than a ‘two-membered relationship’ see Robert M. Adams, ‘The Problem of Total Devotion’, in R. Audi and W. J. Wainwright (eds.), *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 175.

(4) Augustine considers but rejects as an analogy for the Trinity the analogy of human father, mother, and child, mainly on the grounds of lack of scriptural support. See his De Trinitate 12. chs. 5 and 6. His discussion treats Scripture in this place in a very literal way, and is in any case marred by supposing that since the Father is called ‘father’ and the Son ‘son’, the analogy would require him to look in Scripture for a comparison of the Spirit to a mother. But since the Spirit is supposed to be the third member of the Trinity who in some sense depends on the other two, that comparison is obviously not the appropriate one. Gregory Nazianzen makes a comparison of the Trinity to Adam, Eve, and Seth whom he claims also to be ‘consubstantial’, his main point being that one person can come from another person by means other than begetting—Eve coming from Adam's rib—and that this provides an analogy for the non-begetting means of origin of the Spirit from the Father. See his *Theological Orations*, 5. 11.

(5) Important to medieval thought was the Dionysian Principle that goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and so of being. A perfectly good being will cause more and more existence. A crucial issue was whether the perfect goodness of God was adequately expressed in the continual mutual sustenance of the Trinity, or whether perfect goodness needed to express itself further, e.g. in creating a universe. I am much indebted to lectures by Norman Kretzmann for

drawing my attention to this issue. See his ‘Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas’,*Journal of Philosophy*, 80 (1983), 631–49; and two papers in S. MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness*(Cornell University Press, 1991).

(6) In his discussion of how the Fathers understood the unity of God, Stead comments that ‘Christian thinking on the unity of God remained largely intuitive’. See G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Clarendon Press, 1977), 180–9, esp. 181.

(7) As e.g. the Father and Spirit ‘themselves did not become incarnate, but the Father approved and the Spirit co-operated when the Son himself effected his Incarnation’, St Maximus the Confessor, *On the Lord's Prayer* (PG 90: 876).

(8) The claim of Chapter 6 [of *The Christian God*] that the features of the passage of time which might seem unwelcome (making God ‘time's prisoner’) come to God only by his own choice, must now be read as claiming that they come only by the choice of some member of the collective.

(9) For discussion of what makes a being worthy of worship, see my *The Coherence of Theism*(Clarendon Press, 1977), ch. 15.

(10) David Brown claims that in the patristic period  and *persona* both carried a sense of ‘character’ as well as of individual. See his ‘Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality’ in R.J. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). It would follow that the earliest attempts to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity clearly would be initially susceptible of a variety of interpretations, which would need to be refined in the course of subsequent discussion and doctrine formulation.

(11) M. Wiles, ‘Some Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 8 (1957), 92–106, 95–9. For response to Wiles, see Sarah Coakley, ‘Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity’, in S. Coakley and D. A. Pailin (eds.), *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (Clarendon Press, 1993).

(12) Wiles, ‘Reflections’, 101–3.

(13) *Contra Maximinum*, 2.14 (PL 42: 770). See also St John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 1. 8, ‘We have learned that there is a difference between generation and procession, but the nature of that difference we in no way

understand.’

(14) *Summa theologiae*, 1a.27.4 ad 3.

(15) Gregory of Nyssa, ‘An Answer to Ablabius: That we Should Not Think of Saying—There Are Three Gods’, trans. C. C. Richardson in E. R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers* (The Westminster Press, 1954), 266.

(16) See e.g. St Maximus the Confessor, PG 91: 136.

(17) See Additional Note 3 [at the end of this Chapter].

(18) St Athanasius, the Council's most famous subsequent advocate, gave four analogies for the Father/Son relationship, three of which were relations between distinct individuals (substances in my sense or ‘first substances’, to use the patristic term) (including the analogy of the literal father/son relationship) and only one of which was a relation of things within an individual (the analogy of a mind and a word spoken by the mind). See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 262 f.

(19) On the controversy which led up to this insertion and has subsequently been a point of division between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edn. (A. & C. Black, 1972), 358–67.

(20) Note the difference between this version and mine. Both claim in effect that there is one logically indivisible substance, God; but I am not claiming that it is the only substance—the persons which form it are also substances—nor am I claiming that it is divine in exactly the same sense as the persons are divine.

(21) Peter van Inwagen, ‘And yet there are not three Gods, but one God’, in T. V. Morris (ed.),*Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). [Reprinted as Chapter 12 of this Volume.]

(22) Timothy W. Bartel has shown that the Relative Trinitarian (i.e. a theologian who relies on a principle of relative identity to save the doctrine of the Trinity) cannot save his doctrine by modifying the absolute doctrine of identity to a doctrine which brings in ‘*qua*-ness’, i.e. talks of the Son having certain properties only *qua* human or *qua* divine. The modified doctrine would hold not that: ‘for any *x*and any *y* and any sortal *f*, if *x* is the same *f* as *y*, then for any property P, *x* has P if and only if *y* has P’, but only that: ‘for any *x* and any *y* and any sortal *f* and any property P, if *x* is the same *f* as *y*, then *x* has P *qua f* if and only if *y* has P *qua f*’. He shows that even this principle forces the Relative Trinitarian to deny that Father, Son, and Spirit have any distinct properties, e.g.

to deny that ‘begetting the Son’ is a property only of the Father. See Timothy W. Bartel, ‘The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian’, *Religious Studies*, 24 (1988), 129–55.

(23) As van Inwagen points out, the same might still be said of some sentences purporting to describe the content of such deep physical theories as Quantum Theory. But in physics a scientist simply has to operate with the sentences, he is not required in any sense to believe the propositions which they express. Since belief in the Trinity is commended to Christians by the Church, the Church must be purporting to teach the doctrine as one of which there is some graspable content; and if a certain form of that doctrine has the consequence that there cannot be, the Church cannot coherently commend that form for belief, for there is nothing in which belief in it would consist.

(24) H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 23rd edn. (Freiburg, 1963) (hence-forward ‘Denzinger’), nos. 803 f.

(25) Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God* (Cornell University Press, 1989), chs. 5and 6 rightly sees (p. 176) that we need to interpret ‘of the same substance’ ὁμοουσιός) as a relation ‘which links the persons closely while allowing them to be discernible with respect to a certain range of properties’, and rightly rejects Aquinas's theory on the grounds that to get a non-Sabellian trinity (i.e. to get the doctrine that there are three distinct persons, not just three modes of operation of one person) we have to allow that in some sense there is composition in God. However, I find Hughes's own positive suggestion as to how to construe the doctrine unappealing. He suggests understanding ‘of the same substance’ as ‘made of the same stuff’, and the three persons as, as it were, three different ways in which that stuff is organized. My principal objection is that stuff cannot individuate persons, for the reasons given in Ch. 2.

(26) The most influential modern statement of social Trinitarianism is Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. M. Kohl (SCM Press, 1981). He opposes the relative Trinitarian views of the early Karl Barth (Church Dogmatics, 1.1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. T. Thomson (T. & T. Clark, 1936), ch. 2, pt. 1, ‘The Triune God’), and Karl Rahner (see, among other places, the short essay in his Theological Investigations, iv, ‘Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise ‘De Trinitate”, trans. K. Smith (Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1966)). Although it seems to me that Moltmann does not give an adequate account of what binds the members of the Trinity together, my sympathies are

more with him than with Barth and Rahner. For Barth, the Trinity is simply three ‘modes of existence’ of the one God. For Rahner (*Theological Investigations*, iv. 101f.) the Trinity is simply ‘the three-fold quality of God in himself’, his triune ‘personality’. He denies that there are ‘three different consciousnesses’. For a typology of modern theological writing on the Trinity see Coakley, ‘Why Three?’.

(27) *De diversis quaestionibus* 83. q. 50 (Migne, PL 40: 31).

(28) *De Trinitate* 3.14 and 3.15.

(29) Alexander of Hales (*Summa theologiae* 1.304) quotes Richard of St Victor. St Bonaventure (*Itinerarium*, 6) writes of the need for an eternal principle having a ‘beloved and a cobeloved’.

(30) *Summa theologiae*, 1a.32.1.

(31) Ibid. 1a.32.1 ad 2.

(32) See my The *Existence of God* (Clarendon Press, 1979), 119 for the negative claim that deductive arguments cannot be given. See *The Existence of God*, *passim*, for the positive claim that fairly strong inductive arguments can be given.

(33) For the nature of such evidence see my *Revelation* (Clarendon Press, 1992).

# Has a Trinitarian God Deceived Us?

**William Hasker**

Has a Trinitarian God deceived us? According to Dale Tuggy, if God is the Trinity (as conceived by Social Trinitarians) then God has deceived us by telling us, and otherwise leading us to believe, that he is a single person, whereas in reality he – or rather, they – are not one person but three. To be sure, Tuggy does not think God has actually deceived us in this way, and from this he infers that God is not a Trinity in the sense intended. This argument is a central theme in Tuggy's critique of Social Trinitarianism.[1]

We need to see, however, what the Social Trinitarianism criticized by Tuggy amounts to. He states that "Many who consider themselves Social Trinitarians are not, by the understanding of ST adopted here…. They say that God is in some way like three persons or three men, but deny that God contains three distinct minds, centres of consciousness, wills, or thinking things (persons)." In Tuggy's view, then, a Social Trinitarian is one who does affirm that "God contains three distinct minds, centres of consciousness, wills, or thinking things." He makes it clear that on STas he understands it "God" names, not an individual, but "a *mere* group of individuals" ("Deception," p. 285 n. 1). If this view of God is correct, Tuggy argues, then God has indeed deceived us. (Perhaps it is appropriate to state here that my defense of Social Trinitarianism in this paper is indeed directed at ST as he understands it, with one qualification: I shall not defend the claim that God is "a mere group of individuals.")

Tuggy illustrates his argument by a tale concerning Annie, a young girl who was raised in an orphanage. Longing, as many orphans do, for the love and care of a parent, she was overjoyed one day at receiving a telephone call from Fred, a man who confided that he was, in fact, her father. Though he was unable, for various reasons, to meet her in person just yet, he would keep in touch with her, help her as best he could, and take a keen interest in her life and welfare. Over the ensuing years there were many other phone calls, as well as letters, gifts, and wise counsel that Fred proffered from time to time, and Annie's life was much better as a result **(p.39)** of this attention. We can imagine Annie's joy and excitement when at last the day came when Fred would be able to visit her in person. But her excitement changed to consternation when, on the appointed day, not one man got off the airplane but rather three extremely similar (though subtly different) men, each wearing an "I love Annie" tee shirt. Subsequently they

explained to her that all three of them had been communicating with her, sending gifts and assistance, and watching over her life. None of them is literally her father, but they all occupy a father-like role in her life, as indeed she can see has been the case. “Fred,” however, is an invented character, thought up by them as a way to keep her from being puzzled by the oddity of the relationships involved. After a time Annie comes to accept this, and develops a good ongoing relationship with her three “father figures.” But she remains puzzled, and has occasional flashes of lingering resentment, over the deception that was practiced on her. “Why didn’t they tell me the truth?” she asks herself. “I could perfectly well have understood, and I am disappointed in them that they thought they had to deceive me as they did.”[2]

The application to Trinitarian doctrine should be clear enough. In the Old Testament Yahweh emphatically proclaimed himself to be the one and only Father, Redeemer, and covenant partner of Israel, as well as the sole Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. He had harsh words for those who thought that some other individual could be his equal in these respects. Yet it turns out, as revealed by the doctrine of the Trinity, that the Creator God is not a single individual, but rather a group of three. Yahweh, like Fred in Tuggy's parable, turns out to be a fictional character, invented in order to make a plausible story until the true state of affairs could be revealed. But surely, whatever we think of the invention of Fred, such deception on the part of God is unthinkable.

In this first “divine deception argument” the persons deceived were the Hebrew believers of the Old Testament, who mistakenly thought that Yahweh was God, when in fact (as we have seen) Yahweh is a fictional character. A second divine deception argument applies to the believers of the New Testament, including “the New Testament writers, early Christians, and Jesus Christ himself,” all of whom “identified Yahweh not with the collection of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but rather with the Father” (“Deception,” p. 275). Tuggy argues extensively, on exegetical grounds, that this is the case, asserting that “One searches the New Testament in vain for any representation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as collectively constituting the group called ‘God’. (Passages in which all three are merely mentioned or depicted are irrelevant here.)” (“Deception,” p. 275) So here is the second argument:

> If ST is true and the apostolic teaching was divinely inspired, at least one of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit induced (at least) John, Paul, and Peter (dare we add Jesus Christ?) to identify God and the Father. Remember that,

> according to ST, God is *not* identical to the Father; "God" doesn't name an individual, but is a term for a unique and closely united *group* of three divinities. If God and the Father *aren't* identical, then inducing belief **(p.40)** that they *are* is imprudent and/or immoral. Hence, on the supposition of ST, at least one divine being engaged in an act of deception that was imprudent and/or immoral. But divine beings don't do that. Hence, ST is false ("Deception," pp. 279–80).

Readers might at this point be inclined to suppose that Tuggy means by his arguments to support the main rival to Social Trinitarianism, namely Latin Trinitarianism. According to LT, the Trinitarian Three, while properly called "persons" in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, are nevertheless not persons in the ordinary sense, or in any sense closely analogous to the ordinary sense. Thus from the standpoint of LT, the statement that God comprises three "persons" does not conflict with the assertion that God is a *single* person, namely Yahweh or the Father of Jesus Christ. In view of this, it seems that LT is not subject to the divine deception arguments Tuggy has mounted against ST. However, it would be premature to conclude from this that Tuggy himself embraces LT. On the contrary, he rejects LT at least as emphatically as he rejects ST, and gives a number of arguments specifically directed against this view (see "Unfinished," pp. 171–74).[3] In spite of all this Tuggy is no skeptic concerning the Trinity; he writes "I believe that there is a doctrine of the Trinity which is consistent, intelligible, and scripturally kosher." He adds "But that is a story for another day" ("Unfinished," p. 180).

Several years later (the quoted remark was published in 2003), the implied promise remains unfulfilled. I think there is good reason to be skeptical. Tuggy takes it as a datum that God has revealed that he, Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, is strictly identical with the Father of Jesus Christ. He holds this "datum of revelation" invariant in all his reflections concerning the Trinity. Given this, the question inevitably arises (as it has since the earliest days of the Church), What shall we make of Jesus Christ? In one place Tuggy seems to signal his willingness to accept "the claim in the creed of the Council of Nicea (325), that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father." He stipulates, however, that the claim must be "understood as originally intended, as asserting that the Son is divine like his Father (reading *homoousios* as meaning qualitative, not numerical same-ness)."[4] In this case we shall have, in addition to the *one and only true* God (= the Father), *another divine being* who, like God, is eternal, uncreated, omnipotent, omniscient, and worthy of worship. (Presumably there will need to

be some sort of co-operative arrangement concerning creation, since it cannot be the case that Father and Son are each the unique and sole Creator.) It is hard to see what more one would have to say for the view to qualify as straightforwardly polytheistic. If on the other hand the *homoousion* is denied, we shall be left with some variety of Arianism, a view which has been repeatedly and consistently rejected by the**(p.41)** Church throughout its history. I doubt that Tuggy wants to embrace Arianism (though I am not certain about this). But if not, where is he to turn?

Tuggy considers possible responses to the deception argument, including the idea that the deception was "a permissible, or even an obligatory action." His comments on this response deserve to be quoted at some length, beginning with the proposed rationale for the deception:

> The Holy Three are uniquely unified in a way that no other threesome is. Functionally, they are like a single divine person, and they share a wonderful corporate life together, of a depth not seen in earthly relationships. The "Yahweh" character was introduced because doing so was less misleading than revealing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Especially in the context of ancient polytheism, people would have tended to think of the Three as rivals…. Hence the Three justifiably "revealed" themselves as the one god, until the time was right ("Deception," p. 280).

Tuggy responds, however,

> This reply is unpromising. First, why couldn't ancient people have understood the notion of three deities who work together perfectly, and whose wills are perfectly in harmony? There is nothing terribly difficult about understanding three beings who love one another, and perfectly co-operate in all that they do…. Ancient people were not stupid; presumably, they could have understood this as well, though we can admit that they would have been tempted to think of the Three as rivals. In revealing themselves, the Three need only have emphasized their functional unity; introduction of the fictional "Yahweh" seems unnecessary and wrong…. Further, whenever it was that the ST proponent thinks that the charade was dropped (in New Testament times, Patristic times, or in recent analytic philosophy of religion), she can't specify something crucially different about that time, as opposed to the days of the patriarchs or the prophets. Thus the reply looks ad hoc, appealing only because it can save the cherished ST account. ("Deception," pp. 280–81)

May it not be, however, that “what made it appropriate for the charade to be dropped was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ”? Tuggy grants that “the life of Christ showed converts to Christianity that what they previously thought impossible was both possible and actual.” But he sees in this “no solace for defenders of ST”:

> The objector, I hope, isn’t claiming that the event of Christ's life changed the basic intellectual faculties humans enjoy. In this respect, it seems, ancient and modern people are alike. But then, the following could have been explained to them circa 200 BCE: “The one ‘God’ is in fact a closely and essentially united community of three divine beings.”
>
> (“Deception,” p. 281)

At this point we need to stop and ask ourselves just why it is that Tuggy regards it as objectionable that God should have at first been revealed as if God were a single person, and then later disclosed to be a Trinity of persons. One might be inclined to think Tuggy is rejecting entirely the notion of progressive revelation. We might suppose he holds that, whenever an earlier expression of revelation seems to sanction a view that differs from later revelation, we must then conclude that either our understanding of the revelation is mistaken, orelse the claim to divine revelation **(p.42)** in one of the two cases is fraudulent. This however would be a mistake; Tuggy does not object in general to the idea of progressive revelation.[5] He acknowledges, for example, that in most of the Old Testament the destiny of all human beings, good and bad alike, was conceived to be Sheol, a place of shadowy existence not dissimilar to the Greek Hades. While Sheol did not amount toentire personal extinction, it was nothing to look forward to; the rewards for good conduct were expected to appear in the present life. (It was the conspicuous failure of some righteous persons to be rewarded during their lifetimes that provided a principal motivation for the doctrine of resurrection, which begins to make its appearance in some of the later books.) But if the problem about the Trinity does not involve a general objection to progressive revelation, what exactly is the difficulty supposed to be?

At least part of the answer is found in a remark concerning Annie's state of mind after she discovered that she had three “dads” rather than one: “She felt like a wife who discovered that her ‘husband’ was really identical triplets taking turns. Such a woman, Annie reflected, would feel she had been raped by all three. Though Annie didn’t feel quite that violated, she did feel violated; she felt sure she had been mistreated” (“Deception,” p. 272). So what makes the Trinitarian

case special has to do with the nature of intimate personal relationships, which makes it entirely unacceptable to allow a person to think she is relating to a single person, when in reality she is relating to a plurality. And because of this Tuggy seems strongly averse to applying the notions of progressive revelation and the development of doctrine to the doctrine of the Trinity, even though these notions are acceptable as applied to other cases such as that of Sheol. So, provided only that the ancient Hebrews did not differ from modern persons in their "basic intellectual faculties," it was obligatory for the Trinity of persons to be revealed to them much earlier, rather than waiting until after the appearance of Jesus! And he seems averse to acknowledging as legitimate any substantive development of Trinitarian doctrine subsequent to the New Testament. Indeed, he attributes this aversion to others as well, stating that "Latin Trinitarians think that first-century Christians view Jesus as sharing one individual essence with the Father. Social Trinitarians read them as attributing a single universal essence and necessarily congruent wills to Christ and his Father" ("Deception," p. 279). It would be interesting to see Tuggy's list of theologically well-informed contemporary Trinitarians who attribute these views to first-century Christians! Of course this simply won't do. The history of Trinitarian doctrine is a history of the *development* of that doctrine; it would be absurd to attribute belief in the results of that development – results which appeared sometime during the fourth century – to the early Christians who stood at the very beginning of the process.

I will not undertake to explain here why the Bible was written as it was and why the understanding of revelation presupposed by Tuggy is flawed. We must as Christians take the Bible as it is, and the history of Christian doctrine as it has actually developed, and endeavor to make the best sense of them we can; it is a serious mistake to begin with a priori stipulations about what "must" be the case **(p.43)** with regard to these matters. I do not believe that, given familiarity with the evidence and sufficient reflection, anyone can reasonably understand the nature of revelation and the development of doctrine in the way Tuggy wants us to do. Since he is wrong on these foundational matters, his divine deception argument against Social Trinitarianism is also flawed. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the notions of Yahweh as a fictional character, and of the New Testament teaching about God as involving systematic deception, are deeply repugnant to Christian understanding. If we reject Tuggy's "spin" on these topics, the task still remains of providing some better account of them. A brief article such as the present one hardly offers an adequate venue for developing either a satisfying doctrine of the Trinity or an adequate account of the historical development of Trinitarian doctrine. Nevertheless, if the concerns raised by

Tuggy are to be addressed, some gestures must be made in those directions. The reader is asked to consider the following charitably, keeping in mind the limitations imposed by the situation.

I will begin with a series of methodological precepts which I maintain should govern the consideration by Christians of the doctrine of the Trinity. These are intended as defeasible proposals, to be withdrawn if and when it becomes apparent that they are obstructing inquiry rather than promoting it. Still, I have considerable confidence that these proposals represent "Christian common sense" in this matter, and I am hopeful that they will commend themselves to many readers as such. Here is the first precept: *We should accept the Trinitarian tradition of the Church as being on the whole a sound and reliable guide to our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity*. This does not amount to a claim of infallibility; there are undoubtedly conflicting assertions to be found within the tradition, sometimes even within the same author or document. And it does not by any means assert that no further progress is possible. Still, the thought is that we should place fundamental trust in this tradition – that we should assume that by following it we are, as it were, being steered in the right direction.[6]

Why should we accept this precept? Positively, if the Holy Spirit has been given to lead us into the truth it seems reasonable to believe that, even if many of us prove to be stupid or recalcitrant, the Spirit will have prevented the Church from falling into gross error in its most fundamental teachings.[7] (Some will want to **(p.44)** make stronger claims than this; what I say is not inconsistent with those stronger claims, but I am aiming at a minimal statement.) It should also be noted that the prospects if the precept is rejected are rather grim. We would not, I think, be inclined to reject the precept unless we had already concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity embraced by the Church is fundamentally flawed. At that point, two alternatives present themselves: We could adopt a conception of the Trinity that is at odds with the Church's teaching, or we could abandon Trinitarianism altogether. With regard to the first option, the versions of Trinitarian thought deemed heretical have been rejected by the Church for weighty reasons; the prospects of overcoming those reasons and thereby arriving at a viable Trinitar-ianism are not promising. The alternative of rejecting Trinitarianism altogether, on the other hand, has been extensively explored by the liberal theology of the past three centuries or so; the results, taken as a whole, do not inspire a great deal of confidence.

Here is the second precept: *We should acknowledge and accept as appropriate*

*and proper the actual process by which Trinitarian doctrine has developed*. This precept follows naturally from the first: The Trinitarian tradition, considered historically, just is this process of development, so affirming the tradition entails accepting the process as well. This does not mean, of course, that we affirm every step that was taken (there were many missteps). Nor do we condone the ethically outrageous behavior that occurred during some of the controversies, or the dubious political maneuverings that marked some of the councils. Here a parallel may be drawn with the early history of Israel, as recorded in the Pentateuch. By no means was everything in that history ethically above-board and pleasing to God, as the text itself attests. Nevertheless, through this checkered history God was working to accomplish his purposes for his chosen people. In the same way, we may affirm that God was working in the Church of the early centuries to keep it from falling into destructive errors concerning the person and work of Christ. This does not mean that everything about the development had to occur in just the way that it did. But the general character of the development, beginning with the powerful but unsystematic witness of the New Testament and proceeding through various stages of clarification and refinement, with alternatives considered and either accepted or rejected – the general character of the process should be affirmed as right and proper. The process was, in the most fundamental sense, the way in which the Spirit led the Church to better understand the nature of the God it worships.

The third precept is as follows: *We should acknowledge and respect the nature and limitations of Trinitarian language, in particular its analogical character*. Not for nothing did Augustine write, "When the question is asked, 'What three?'…the answer is given 'Three Persons,' not that it might be spoken, but that it might not be left unspoken."[8] It has repeatedly been the experience of those who sought to write concerning the Trinity that "words fail us" – that what needs to be expressed exceeds the limits of the language that is available. So language has to be bent, **(p.45)** stretched, taken out of its normal context and put to new uses, in order to convey the appropriate ideas concerning the divine Tri-unity. Language treated in this fashion is inevitably analogical in character; it shares some of its meaning with more customary uses of the expressions in question, but deviates from those uses in other respects.[9] To some extent, it must be said, this feature of Trinitarian language tends to be obscured by the apparent precision of creedal formulations. The creeds are definite because they are intended to furnish a norm for Christian teaching and belief, but any sense of "scientific precision" is belied once we begin to look more closely at the process by which they were formulated.[10] Accepting the tradition, then, entails accepting

the language of Trinitarian belief *with its limitations*.

Here is the final precept: *The nature of Trinitarian language requires that we exercise restraint in our attempts to formalize this language and to employ it in the construction of systematic deductive arguments*. Here, I am afraid, is where the shoe really begins to pinch so far as we analytic philosophers are concerned! We have a strong professional bias that impels us to make our own language as precise as it can possibly be, and to demand the same precision of others insofar as it lies in our power to do so. When confronted with vague and imprecise formulations we feel a powerful urge to disambiguate them, and if this cannot be done we are inclined to doubt whether the offending expressions have any meaning at all. We have by now got beyond the stage at which all religious language automatically comes under suspicion as being meaningless, but the urge to precision, and the corresponding urge to construct tight formal arguments, remain very much a part of our mindset.[11]

I am not decrying these tendencies; they serve a purpose and much good philosophy results from their being honored. I merely point out that the nature of Trinitarian language, as briefly described above, places necessary limitations on the tendencies in question. Terms used in formal arguments must be constant in meaning in relevant respects in order for the arguments to be valid; otherwise we have the fallacy of equivocation. With analogical language, on the other hand, there is often a degree of ambiguity or vagueness concerning the intended **(p.46)** meaning – that is, concerning how much of the original meaning is carried over in the analogy. This ambiguity tends to be covered up, however, if we replace the analogical term with a symbolic letter or logical formula, as is often done in constructing formal arguments. Another pitfall lies in the assumption we are prone to make that our existing philosophical vocabulary is adequate to express the concepts and make the distinctions that are needed for the doctrine of the Trinity. Christian thinkers in the early centuries who were struggling to think through the doctrine of God often found existing conceptions inadequate for their purposes; it would be hubristic for us to assume that, because our philosophical resources are greater than theirs, the same situation cannot arise for us. But what I am saying should not be over-interpreted. I am not putting up a sign saying to my fellow analytic philosophers, “Abandon hope, all you who enter here.” I merely suggest that we tread a bit softly, and consider carefully whether our professional inclinations are serving or impeding the task of understanding Trinitarian doctrine.[12]

With these precepts in mind, we proceed to Tuggy's objections. We begin with what he terms the “Quaternity problem.” Should we say, as some have wanted to do, that the three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit somehow literally combine to make a *single* person that we designate as “God”? I agree with him that we should not say this. On the one hand, the idea that multiple persons somehow combine so as to become literally a single person may well be incoherent, so that it does not describe a real possibility. But if we suppose this objection to be overcome, we should then have, not a Holy Trinity, but a Holy Quaternity, the four persons being Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and God. I agree with Tuggy that such a view does not commend itself on the grounds either of scripture, or tradition, or reason. But is the alternative view of Social Trinitarianism any better off? According to Tuggy, if “God is not an individual, but just a community or collection of divine individuals, God will not have any personal characteristics at all, except in the derivative sense in which communities have them. He, or rather it, will not be conscious, omniscient, omnipotent, compassionate, and so on” (“Tradition,” p. 448). He continues, “Now must we not say, if we are to be theists at all, that God is a divine person?” (“Tradition,” p. 449).

In reply, I invite us first to consider the ways in which we do speak of certain collective bodies as though they were single individuals, such as “the Management” of a corporation, or “the Administration” of a college. It makes perfectly good sense to say that the Management knows all about so-and-so, or that the Administration has decided to do this or not to do that. It is true that there are particular human beings who have known the relevant things or made the **(p.47)** decision in question, but we may not know which individuals those are or even how many of them there are. These uses are, to be sure, analogical (as Tuggy says, “derivative”), but they are none the worse for that.

Now consider part of Tuggy's own description of the persons of the Trinity, conceived in terms of ST: “The Holy Three are uniquely unified in a way that no other threesome is. Functionally, they are like a single divine person, and they share a wonderful corporate life together, of a depth not seen in earthly relationships” (“Deception,” p. 280). Add to this that the persons *interpenetrate* one another, in such a way that each is immediately aware of what is experienced by each of the others. (This is one facet of the doctrine of *perichoresis*.[13]) The persons, furthermore, are not only harmonious in all of their thoughts and actions, but necessarily so: It is simply impossible that they conflict with one another in any way. (For them, the problem of what happens when two

omnipotent beings disagree cannot arise.) The persons form a *functional unity*: In our dealing with them they are indistinguishable, except in the special cases of the incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit.[14] Given all this, is it not perfectly reasonable and appropriate to say of the Trinity as a whole that "God thinks…," "God has decided…," "God rejoices…," and so on? And is this not sufficient for one who says these things to qualify as a theist? It seems to me that the answer to these questions should be affirmative; if you disagree, I am going to say that you have become too attached to ways of thinking and speaking about God that are "merely theistic" rather than Trinitarian and Christian!

The case for an affirmative answer will be all the stronger if there is an objective, metaphysical unity between the persons – if they in some way literally constitute "one substance" or something of that sort.[15] A Social Trinitarian may very well want to say something along those lines – and will accordingly deny Tuggy's assumption that the Trinity is "a *mere* group of individuals" – but this is a difficult topic and has not been pursued in the present discussion. When this theme is properly developed this will strengthen further the case for the propriety of speaking of "God" – the Holy Trinity – in the singular and attributing personal **(p.48)** actions and attributes to God, without any need for a literal merging of persons into a single super-person.

Let us now consider very briefly the development of Trinitarian thought. At the beginning of the process, during the life of Jesus, the God of the Jewish people (the name "Yahweh" had already ceased to be used) was simply "God," the Lord – and it is this God whom Jesus came to know as his heavenly Father. How could it possibly have been otherwise? But in the course of time both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are revealed as divine beings. (Tuggy agrees that the New Testament writings assert this ("Unfinished," p. 167).) Already in Matthew's Great Commission we have the triad of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though nothing is spelled out concerning the nature of the triad. (But won't a reading that places them "on the same level" – that of divinity – be more plausible than one that places them on wholly different levels of existence?) During the next three centuries much is said, thought, and written concerning the nature and status of Jesus, culminating in the declaration of the council of Nicea that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father. The slightly later council of Constantinople in effect extended this to the Holy Spirit, so that Father, Son, and Spirit are each proclaimed to be divine.

Now, all during this time the usage remains intact, according to which "God"

refers simply to the Father – the usage on which Tuggy lays so much emphasis. In the Nicene Creed itself we read, "We believe in*one God, the Father,* the almighty…" Yet a dynamic has been set in motion that renders this formulation less than fully adequate. For as already noted, the other teachings of the Creed seem to have the implication that *in addition to the one and only God, there are two other fully divine persons,* namely the Son and the Holy Spirit. And this, if not simply contradictory, is clearly tritheistic – and clearly unacceptable. So there is an inexorable pressure to bring the Son and the Spirit "within the circle of divinity" – to say that the "one God" comprises not only the Father, but also the Son and the Spirit. It is this pressure that comes to formal expression in the Athanasian Creed, albeit with paradoxical elements included that give trouble to interpreters down to the present.[16] As a result, we have in Christian usage a dual reference for the word "God": Often it refers specifically to the Father, conforming to what Tuggy rightly points out is the standard usage in the New Testament. At other times, however, it refers to the Trinity as a whole; sometimes the word "Godhead" is used instead, to avoid confusion with the use of "God" to refer to the Father.

What this comes to is that the assertion "Yahweh, the one and only God, is the Father of Jesus," should be seen, not as a divinely-revealed identity statement (as Tuggy would have it), but rather as *a particular stage in the development of the Christian understanding of God* – a development which culminated in the **(p.49)** doctrine of the Trinity. Once we have seen this, the problems raised by his arguments disappear. It should be added, however, that the usage in which "God" refers to the Father is alive and well right down to the present day; it is probably the most common usage for Christians generally. But rightly understood, it simply does not have the implications Tuggy wants us to worry about. (I suggest that Tuggy ought to ask himself why the "problem of divine deception" in the doctrine of the Trinity has not surfaced earlier in the history of the Church's reflection on this question.)

Finally, what about Yahweh? Who was it that the Jewish people came to know as their Lord and God? In the light of what has been said, we can dismiss the notion of Yahweh as a fictional character. Here is a way of looking at the matter that appeals to me: Our natural condition, as human beings, is one in which we perceive and grasp God only in a vague and indistinct fashion. (*That* statement, at any rate, is one I feel very confident in making!) We see God "in a glass darkly," and much about him remains unresolved mystery. That this is so does not prevent us from worshiping him and paying him reverence. Revelation,

however, has in part the function of “sharpening the focus,” of bringing us to clearer understanding of that which previously was somewhat vague and indeterminate. Put differently, revelation is the binoculars through which God is “magnified and clarified” to our spiritual vision. Now, when we have learned to use those binoculars properly, and to adjust their focus so as to aid our weak eyesight, we make a wonderful discovery – the God whom we formerly viewed as a single personal being is revealed as a complex unity, in fact as a Trinity of persons! This is as much of a shock, in its way, as finding out that the scum on the neighborhood pond is teeming with microscopic life. But the problem is really quite a different one: It's not that God is “too small” to be visible to the naked eye, but that he is *much too big* for us to “see” with our impaired spiritual vision.[17] Here is another comparison: Astronomers sometimes find that what they have regarded as a single star is in reality a group of two, three, or more stars orbiting closely around one another. The improved vision from a better telescope reveals a situation that is much more complex, and more interesting, than was previously supposed. In a somewhat similar way, the revelation of Jesus and the Spirit in the New Testament, the revelation which in due course gave shape to the doctrine of the Trinity, shows us a God whose life is richer and more complex than we could otherwise imagine.

If all this is at least approximately correct, then it was perfectly natural and appropriate for the ancient Jews to worship the Triune God as Yahweh, conceived by them as a single personal being. But were they not, in fact, in error to do so? And if they were, doesn’t the deception argument return in full force? By way of an answer to this, consider again the example from astronomy. The astronomers who regarded what is in fact a multiple as a single star did hold an incorrect belief concerning the astronomical object in question. But this “error” carries no **(p.50)** implication of fault on their part; they were understanding the situation in the very best way that was possible, given the resources that were available to them. Fault would, perhaps, attach to someone who had available the superior instrumentation that would have revealed the multiple stars but refused, for no good reason, to make it available. But no sensible theologian supposes that God has acted whimsically or without good and sufficient reason in making his self-revelation gradual and progressive, rather than presenting the fullness of his truth to the ancient Hebrews all at once, in a single package. That is not to say, of course, that we can always see why some particular truth was not revealed earlier, or in a different way, than in fact it was. But it is hardly reasonable to expect that we will always be able to see this.

Given all this, the “problem of divine deception” simply disappears. The source of this problem is now seen to be the rejection, where Trinitarian doctrine is concerned, of the concept of progressive revelation and the related concept of the development of doctrine. If we absolutize the limitations of an earlier stage in the revelatory process, and oppose those limitations to the fuller insights that become available later on, conflict is inevitable. Ancient Jews who were locked into the belief in Sheol were unwilling or unable to come to terms with the concept of resurrection. (The Sadducees of New Testament times may be an example.) Jews who cling to an overly simple and abstract conception of divine unity make that a reason to deny the revelation in Jesus Christ. And many other examples could be cited. We have seen something of the difficulties created if we insist on holding as absolute the equation, “Yahweh = God = the Father.” This equation may seem especially compelling, because it is thought to represent the way of thinking of Christ and his apostles, though I would argue that the importation of the philosophical notion of strict identity creates a misleading impression of precision. But why is it insisted that we cannot get beyond this formulation, as is done in the doctrine of the Trinity? Is it unacceptable to hold that something new and amazing came to light in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – something that in a deep way re-shapes our conception of God? No Christian, I think, would want to deny that this is the case. The thought must be, rather, that the full meaning and implications of this “new thing” must have been apparent immediately, so that we should be able to read it off directly from the New Testament text, rather than waiting three centuries or so for the Trinitarian doctrine to reach maturity. But to put the matter a bit simplistically: This may be the way we would have done it, but it doesn’t seem to be the way *God* chose to do it! We may, upon reflection, be able to see some reasons why the developmental process was appropriate in this case. But whether we can see this or not, we need to respect the way in which God has actually done things, rather than insist that he must, after all, have done them in the way that seems most natural to us.

One final objection may occur at this point. If in this way we allow the formulations in scripture to be transcended by later insights, what is to prevent us from going even farther? What would keep us from concluding that the revelation in Jesus is not, after all, the full revelation of God – that it needs to be supplemented or even superseded by some one of the myriad of modern **(p.51)** “prophets” and religious leaders? The concern is a genuine one, but the proposed solution – that we hold ever tighter to the exact words of biblical revelation, and refuse to go beyond them in any respect – is not the right solution and will not,

in the long run, prove successful. The finality and ultimacy of the revelation in Jesus is guaranteed, not by a doctrine of biblical inspiration, but by Jesus Christ himself.[18]

Notes:

(1) Dale Tuggy, “The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing,” *Religious Studies* 39 (June 2003), pp. 165–83; “Tradition and Believability: Edward Wierenga's Social Trinitarianism,” *Philosophia Christi*5:3 (2003), pp. 447–56; and “Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies*40 (September 2004), pp. 269–87. These papers are cited as “Unfinished,” “Tradition,” and “Deception,” respectively, followed by the page numbers.

(2) “Deception,” pp. 270–74; my retelling of the story omits many colorful details, for which the reader is advised to consult Tuggy's article.

(3) As it happens, I am in agreement with Tuggy that LT does not offer a viable alternative for Trinitarian theorizing. But neither Tuggy's objections to LT nor my own will be pursued here; one can’t do everything in one short paper.

(4) What he says is “This claim is consistent with the argument of this paper” (“Unfinished,” p. 181). That does not amount to unqualified acceptance, but it seems to point in that direction.

(5) My thanks to Dale Tuggy for clarifying this point in private correspondence.

(6) In contrast to this, Tuggy commends what he terms “a radical reformation approach, which is to first see what the scriptures, reasonably interpreted, require, and then accept or reject later formulations insofar as they fit well with scripture and reason” (“Tradition,” p. 453). Presumably creedal formulations are not to be given any weight in determining the interpretation of scripture; otherwise circularity would result. As an antidote to the appeal this “radical reformation approach” may have for some readers, I recommend William J. Abraham's important work, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

(7) This prompts the question, what sort of guidance should we expect to receive from the definitions enacted by councils and accepted by the church? For some provocative observations on this topic, see Sarah Coakley, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition’,” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel

Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 143–63.

(8) Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. A. W. Hadden (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873), bk. 5, chap. 9.

(9) One reader of a draft of this paper demanded at this point to be told "Where in the doctrine of the Trinity is the analogical language? What are the analogical terms?" This question assumes (contrary to virtually the entire theological tradition) that the default position is that the terms in the doctrine of the Trinity are employed in a way that is univocal with the use of the same terms in everyday language, and any exception to this needs to be justified. It is this assumption, I believe, that has played a major role in creating Tuggy's difficulties with the doctrine – and not only his. In my view, the starting and default position should be that *all* of the key terms used in the doctrine are analogical; claims that definitions have been given that capture the univocal "core" shared by the diverse uses of the terms need to be carefully scrutinized.

(10) Sarah Coakley points out that the "the assembled bishops [at Chalcedon] were deeply reluctant to come up with any new formulas at all"; she notes that the Definition does not define such key terms s*physis and hypostasis* – terms whose meaning was by no means firmly fixed and clarified by previous usage. (See "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not?," pp. 145, 147–48.)

(11) Note in this connection Coakley's remarks about the tendencies of analytic philosophers in dealing with these doctrines ("What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not?," pp. 156–59).

(12) There is a remark of Tuggy's that I find particularly amusing. After setting out an argument against Social Trinitarianism in the notation of symbolic logic, he writes, "It seems that (after being instructed in using the logical symbols '=' and '≠') Christ, his apostles, and their immediate students would accept the direct argument just given" ("Deception," p. 284). This conjures up an image of Tuggy on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, conducting a short course on modal logic for Jesus and his disciples!

(13) For some illuminating comments on the doctrine of *perichoresis*, See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 43–45, 316–17.

(14) The traditional formula for this functional unity is, *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.

(15) As an example of a Social Trinitarian view that does this, I mention my own article, “Tri-Unity” (*The Journal of Religion* 50:1 (January 1970), pp. 1–32). Additional examples may be found in several of the contributions to this volume, which affirm in God “three distinct centres of consciousness” while denying that God is “a mere group of individuals.” Over against this, Michael Rea points out that such a move may leave one outside the “Social Trinitarian” camp, on some understandings of what ST amounts to. In my opinion, however, this objection rests on an overly narrow conception of Social Trinitarianism. The defining feature of ST, in my estimation, is to be found in the possibility and actuality of personal relationships between the Persons of the Trinity; any Trinitarian view that affirms this may properly be termed “social.” But this theme can’t be properly developed in the present article.

(16) Most problematic are the assertions that “there are not three eternals but one eternal,” and similarly for the other divine attributes. This leads to contradiction with the assertions, also contained in the creed, that Father, Son, and Spirit have different properties (and thus are distinct from one another) and that each is eternal. Whether a charitable reading is possible that will overcome this contradiction will not be discussed here.

(17) Some of the mystics, however, do claim to have experiences of God as the Trinity; I for one have no inclination to contradict them.

(18) My thanks to Thomas McCall, Alan Padgett, Michael Rea, John Sanders, and especially to Dale Tuggy, for valuable comments on earlier versions of this material.

# Anti Social Trinitarianism

**Brian Leftow**

The Athanasian Creed tells Christians that ‘we worship one God in Trinity…the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.’[1] Such odd arithmetic demands explaining. The explanations I have seen fall into two broad classes. Some begin from the oneness of God, and try to explain just how one God can be three divine Persons. As Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas pursue this project, let us call it Latin Trinitarianism (LT). Others start from the threeness of the Persons, and try to say just how three Persons can be one God. Some call this theological project Social Trinitarianism (ST). I now try to recommend LT over ST. I now argue that ST cannot be both orthodox and a version of monotheism. I show *en route* that LT does not have ST's problems with monotheism.

## I Two Problems Posed

In LT, there is just one divine being (or substance), God. God constitutes three Persons, but all three are at bottom just God. Thus, the Creed of the Council of Toledo has it that ‘although we profess three persons, we do not profess three substances, but one substance and three persons…they are not three gods, he is one God.…Each single Person is wholly God in Himself and…all three persons together are one God.’[2]

Again, Aquinas writes that ‘among creatures, the nature the one generated receives is not numerically identical with the nature the one generating has.… But God begotten receives numerically the same nature God begetting has.’[3]

To make Aquinas’ claim perfectly plain, I introduce a technical term, ‘trope’. Abel and Cain were both human. So they had the same nature, humanity. Yet each **(p.53)** also had his own nature, and Cain's humanity was not identical with Abel's: Abel's humanity perished with Plato, while Aristotle's went marching on. This could be so because although the two had the same nature, they had (speaking technically) distinct tropes of that nature. A trope is an individualized case of an attribute. Their bearers individuate tropes: Cain's humanity is distinct from Abel's just because it is Cain's, not Abel's.

With this term in hand, I now restate Aquinas’ claim: while Father and Son instance the divine nature (deity), they have but one trope of deity between them,

which is God's.[4] While Abel's humanity ≠ Cain's humanity, the Father's deity = the Son's deity = God's deity. But bearers individuate tropes. If the Father's deity is God's, this is because the Father just is God: which last is what Aquinas wants to say.

In LT, then, the numerical unity of God is secure, but one wonders just how the Persons manage to be three. For in LT, the Persons are distinct but not discrete. Instead, LT's Persons have God in common, though not exactly as a common part. In ST, the Persons are distinct and discrete. There is nothing one would be tempted to call a part they have in common. What they share is the generic divine nature, an attribute.

For ST, Father, Son, and Spirit are three individual cases of deity, three divine substances, as Adam, Eve, and Abel are three human substances. For ST, there are in the Trinity three tropes of deity, not one.[5] In most versions of ST, each Person has his own discrete mind and will, and 'the will of God' and 'the mind of God' either are ambiguous or refer to the vector sum of the Persons' thoughts and wills. Like three humans, ST's Persons make up a community. For Plantinga, 'the Holy Trinity is a divine…society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities…one divine family or monarchy'.[6] Brown too has it that God names a 'perfect divine society',[7] Layman that 'God is the divine persons in a special relationship'.[8] In some versions of ST, this community is itself at least quasi-personal.[9] And some suggest that the Persons are so intimately entwined, that 'community' and 'society' are almost misleading. Thus, Williams: 'Each of the Persons…has knowledge and will of his own, but is entirely open to those of the other, so that each…sees with his eyes, as it were.…Each speaks with the voice of the others which have become his own **(p.54)** voice.'[10] But save for these notes, it is not hard to state ST's version of the Trinity.[11] Nor is it hard to see what motivates ST. Williams, for instance, argues that

> if love is God's nature, his love must have an object other than his creation or any part of it: to believe otherwise would be to make God dependent for his innermost activity on something which is not himself. But love is relational, and the relation in question is irreflexive…, love in the literal sense requires more than one person. So if God is love, that love must involve the love of one person by another. And if creatures cannot be the only ones who are the object of God's love, there must be a plurality of Persons in the Godhead.[12]

ST claims that its understanding of the Persons' plurality makes best sense of God's inner life. If in God there is just one trope of deity, the love within the Trinity is one substance's love for himself. Even if there can be such a thing, it is (ST argues[13]) less perfect than love for the genuinely other: and God's love must be perfect love.

There are instead two other hard tasks. One is this. It seems that an individual case of deity is a God, or just is God.[14] This seems so all the more if (as in Swinburne and Bartel[15]) the Social Trinitarian takes pains to explain how the Three can cooperate and avoid frustrating one another's activities. Thus, one hard task for ST is to explain why its three Persons are 'not three Gods, but one God', and do so without transparently misreading the Creed.

Williams argues that ST *must* be a version of monotheism, as the claim that it is polytheist is literally unintelligible. There is one God, Williams tells us, in such a way that 'there is more than one God' or 'there are different Gods' are not false but nonsensical.[16] Consider the claims that

(1) it is not the case that the Father is the same God as the Son,
or
(2) the Father is a different God than the Son.

Phrases of such forms as 'is the same A as' or 'is a different A than' allow only mass- or count-terms as values of 'A'. 'F' is a count-term if its sense carries with it **(p.55)** criteria for telling Fs apart, and so (given mastery of number-concepts) for counting Fs. 'Dog' thus is a count-term. Someone who cannot tell where one dog ends and another begins, and thereby count dogs, simply does not understand the term 'dog'. 'F' is a mass-term if there can be such things as a parcel or quantity of F, and one who understands 'F' can sensibly say e.g. that this is not the same parcel of F as that. But (says Williams) 'God' is not a mass- or a count-term, and cannot substitute for 'A' in the phrase 'is not the same A as'; whatever 'there are three divine Persons' does, it cannot count or sum Gods.[17] Thus while one can say there is one God, one cannot assert (1) or (2): the claims ST would have to make to be polytheist cannot sensibly be made.[18]

Can we accept all this? Williams is safe in denying that 'God' is a mass-noun.[19] There indeed cannot be a parcel or lump of God. But his case that 'God' is not a count-noun is just that it is part of the concept of God that there cannot be more than one: 'there is no more sense in talk about Gods or "the same God" than in

talk about North Poles or “the same North Pole” ’.[20] But there is more than one North Pole. We can distinguish the magnetic pole from the pole that lines of longitude determine, and debate which is True North. More to the point, ‘one’ is a number-word. So while noting that there is just one item in a concept's extension is not a case of counting, it is a case of numbering. If there cannot be more than one God, there cannot be a (correct) count of Gods. But if there is one God, there is a numbering of Gods, and a number of Gods. If ‘God’ is a numberterm, it can substitute for ‘A’ in the phrases above as well as a count-term. Pike argues—in my eyes plausibly—that ‘God is a “title term” like “Caesar” ’.[21]There certainly can be many Caesars; the later Roman empire usually had two holding office legitimately at once. So one can very well say, if one wishes, that in ST there are three distinct, discrete Gods.[22] Or if this seems too tendentious, one can surely say that there are three divine beings, each omnipotent, omniscient, etc., and leave to the reader whether this sounds polytheist.

A second hard task for ST is providing an account of what monotheism is which both is intuitively acceptable and lets ST count as monotheist. Monotheists want to say that being a divine being entails being God. In LT, it does. ST must deny this: for ST, there are three divine beings, but there is one God. Intuitively, ‘there is one God’ tells us how many divine beings there are. In LT, it does.[23] In ST, it does not. Intuitively, ‘there is one God’ implies that all divine beings are **(p.56)** identical. In LT, it does. In ST, it does not. Thus, ST's reading of this claim threatens to be strongly counterintuitive.

Plantinga suggests three readings of ‘there is one God’ compatible with ST. As Son and Spirit are in some way *from* the Father, ‘there is only one [ultimate] font of divinity, only one Father, only one God in *that*sense of God’.[24] ‘God’ can also refer to the entire Trinity, and there is only one of these.[25] Finally, there is just one generic divine nature, one set of properties by virtue of which anything qualifies as divine.[26] It is this last, Plantinga suggests, which the Creed mandates: the Creed rules out asserting that there is more than one set of properties by having which something can count as divine.[27] (The Creed is anti-Arian, and the Arians, Plantinga suggests, had taken Christ both as divine and as less so than the Father, thus implying that Christ and the Father have distinct divine natures.) But none of this denies that in ST there are three Gods, if a God is a discrete personal being with the full divine nature. Furthermore, Plantinga's is not the most natural reading of the Creed. Finally, we soon see that each of

these readings of ‘there is one God’ turns out to be problematic for ST. ST's Father is indeed the ‘font of divinity’, and so alone God in one sense of ‘God’. But this (we soon see) creates great inequality among the Persons—perhaps enough to compromise the others’ full deity. There is but one Trinity. But if we take the Trinity's claim to be one God seriously, I argue, we wind up downgrading the Persons’ deity and/or unorthodox. If we do not, ‘the Trinity’ is just a convenient way to refer to the three Persons, and talk of the Trinity makes no progress towards monotheism. We soon also see that the moves which most clearly would show ST to be monotheist repeatedly threaten to slide into Plantinga's sort of Arianism, the positing of more than one way to be divine.

## II Three Social Strategies

For ST, it seems that there are three Gods. Thus, STmust explain why it is a sort of monotheism. I now discuss three strategies ST uses to qualify as monotheist.

One contends that while Father, Son, and Spirit are divine, only the Trinity is most properly God. So Hodgson, reflecting on early Trinitarians: ‘It was inconceivable that the Christian Church should ever be other than monotheistic…What was needed was that into the place hitherto held in men's thought by the one God…should be put *the Trinity as a whole*.’[28] Let us call this strategy ‘Trinity monotheism’.

**(p.57)** Some versions of ST claim either that the three divine Persons have but one mind between them, which is God or the mind of the one God, or that they constitute a fourth divine mind, which is most properly God. Let us call this thesis ‘group mind monotheism’.

Finally, some friends of ST aver that Father, Son, and Spirit are most properly divine, but *function as*one God. Let us call this the claim that ST is a ‘functional monotheism’. As soon emerges, these strategies sometimes overlap.

### Trinity Monotheism

Layman, Brown, and Yandell try to strengthen ST's monotheism by focusing on the way the Trinity as a whole is God.[29] Layman speculates that no Person is omnipotent, so that only jointly does their power ‘add up’ to omnipotence.[30] In this view, the three Persons ‘are’ one God in the straightforward sense that only when they compose something with a greater degree of what makes an item God than anything else, the Trinity has enough power to count as divine. Since it would not do to compose God of three non-divine persons, Layman suggests that

each Person would nonetheless qualify as divine due to being uncreated, eternal, and morally perfect.[31] For reasons I give below, I am unsure that they*can* all be uncreated.[32] If they cannot, Layman is left with an unacceptably low standard for divinity: for no angel is divine, and yet any number of angels could exist eternally (if God can (as I think) create a universe with an infinite past) and be morally perfect, even by nature. But even if no Person is created, Layman seems to set the bar for deity too low. For one can imagine an uncreated eternal morally perfect feckless simpleton—someone of perfect character who has always been and will always be there, with barely enough knowledge and power to count as a moral agent—but one cannot imagine worshipping such a being. This raises hard questions: how great? why only so great and no more?[33]Why is this limitation compatible with being divine? Why does deity require only this much? Any power **(p.58)** and knowledge short of omnipotence and omniscience can be surpassed.[34] Being surpassable in such important respects and being divine do not seem incompatible. If the Persons are of large but finite capacity, the Trinity consists of small-g gods; it is a 'divine society' like Olympus. Let us therefore say that no version of Trinity monotheism is acceptable unless its Persons are somehow individually omnipotent and omniscient.

As Brown sees it, the Trinity has a greater degree of what makes an item divine than anything else. While each Person has a *sort* of omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection, only the Trinity as a whole has the highest sort.[35] Thus, the Trinity has a better claim to the title 'God' than any one Person: only the Trinity is most properly God, and anything else with any claim to deity is just a contributing part of this one thing. Let us explore this, and first tackle omniscience.

According to Brown, 'omniscience…would seem most apposite to…the Godhead as a whole…though each [Person] would be omniscient to the maximum extent…possible for them, their combined knowledge would be greater.'[36] As Brown sees it, some Persons know things others do not: the Son knows first hand what it is to suffer, in a way the Father does not.[37] Plantinga adds that only the Father can say truly 'I am the Father', and only the Son can say truly 'I am the Son'.[38] But neither point is compelling. Aversion of STwhich stresses the Persons' mutual indwelling ('circumincession' or '*perichoresis*') might well let Persons share somehow in other Persons' first-hand knowledge: thus Williams suggests above that each Person 'sees with the other's eyes'. Again, if the Son tokens 'I am the Son', he expresses something true, while if the

Father tokens this, he does not. But this does not entail without further ado that there is a truth the Son knows and the Father does not. The latter follows only if 'I am the Son' expresses a private truth, one only the Son can know. For if 'I am the Son' expresses a truth the Father can know, then if the Father is omniscient, He knows it. And the claim that there are private truths is controversial.[39]

But even if we suppose that there are some such items of exclusive knowledge, it does not follow that the Trinity collectively knows more than any one Person does. There are (I think) two basic ways to take the claim that the Trinity knows something. For the Trinity is either *just* a society, a collection of Persons, or something with a mind of its own, however related to the Persons' minds.

#### (p.59) Is Only the Trinity Omniscient?: The Trinity as Collection

If the Trinity is just a collection, it does not literally know anything. A fortiori it is not omniscient. If the Trinity is a collection, talk of what it knows is in this case just an ellipsis for talk of what all the Persons know, in common or else as a sum. But what the Persons know in common cannot be greater than what any one Person knows, for the intersection of the Persons' bodies of knowledge cannot be larger than any single Person's body of knowledge. And if there is a sum of knowledge greater than that which any Person possesses, but the Trinity is not literally a knower, what still follows from this is not that the Trinity is omniscient but that there is no omniscient knower at all.

The only other sense I can find in talk of a collection having a body of knowledge distinct from its members' runs this way. Each Person has on his own a stock of knowledge. But each supplements his own stock by drawing on the others' stocks. Thus, each has by belonging to the Trinity knowledge he got from another, and so knowledge which in some sense was at first one Person's property becomes in some way a collective possession. Thus, 'the Trinity knows more than the Persons' becomes a colourful way to say 'each Person knows due to being in the Trinity some things he does not know on his own'.[40]But then in parallel, 'on grounds of knowledge, the Trinity has a better claim to the title "God" than any one Person' in turn becomes a colourful way to say:

> (1) Due to being in the Trinity, some of the knowledge by which each person qualifies as divine is knowledge he does not have on his own, and/or
> (2) Some of the knowledge by which each Person qualifies as divine is knowledge he would not have if he were the only divine Person.

If (1) is true, each Person's deity is tied to the others, for each helps the others qualify as divine: the Persons are ‘one God’ in that they are divine due to the way they are one. (2) is trivial if it entails only that each Person knows truths which entail the others’ existence: *of course* no Person would know such truths if the other Persons did not exist, for then these would not be truths. (2) is also trivial if it entails only that each Person knows truths which would not be true were he the only divine Person. Neither triviality would help us say why the Persons are just one God. For Equally, three Gods would qualify as omniscient (and so Gods) only if they knew all truths, including those entailing the other Gods’ existence and some which would not be true were they the sole God. So (2) has punch only if it entails that each Person knows only through the others’ aid some truths which would be true even if (*per impossibile*) the others did not exist. (2)'s cost, then, is allowing that each Person, if (*per impossibile*) on his own, would not be omniscient—and so not divine. But this does not entail that the Trinity is**(p.60)** composed of non-divine Persons, since it does not entail that the Persons are even possibly on their own, and while I find it troubling to say that divine Persons’ being divine depends on anything other than themselves, others may welcome this thought, and say that it expresses precisely the peculiar oneness of the Trinity. For if (2) so read is true, the deity of each Person is tied to the others, for the Persons would not be divine were they not one as they are. If (2) so read is true, then while there are three tropes of deity in the Trinity, it is as if there were but one, for no Person can have his trope unless the others have theirs.

Still, this scenario faces problems. One is just to unpack the way Persons might draw knowledge from other Persons. One does not want to say that some Persons know some things only by other Persons’ testimony, or inference from facts about other Persons. True deity seems to require some more perfect mode of knowledge. But anything short of direct access to another Person's mental states would likely involve inference or something equivalent to testimony. If (say) the Father does something to let the Son know that P, this is broadly a sort of testimony. If the Father does nothing to let the Son know that P, but the Son acquires knowledge that P from something about the Father without accessing his mental state itself, and P is not a truth about the Father, the Son learns that P by inference from a fact about the Father.[41] And yet direct access to the contents of other Persons’ minds will threaten to undermine the claim that they are just that Person's mental contents, and so the basic Social Trinitarian claim that there are three minds in the Trinity.

Again, any Person knows public and (if there are any) private truths. Suppose that each is omniscient on his own with respect to public truths. Then the only truths for which each might tap the rest's resources are the private ones (if there are any): and knowledge of these is precisely unshareable. So if each Person knows all public truths on his own, it is not in fact the case that each knows due to being in the Trinity some things he does not know on his own. I suppose that the Father (say) might 'share' the Son's private knowledge in the sense of being able to rely on the Son to have it and bring it to bear in the right contexts. But this sort of 'sharing' does not add to the stock of truths to which the Father has cognitive access, give him an extra mode of access to a truth He already knows, or add warrant to any of his beliefs. So it does not provide any literal sense in which being in the Trinity adds to or modifies the Father's knowledge.

Suppose, on the other hand, that no Person has public-truth omniscience on his own. Then we face seemingly unanswerable questions. We must ask just where the line falls in each Person's case between what he knows on his own and what he knows via other Persons, and why he knows no more on his own. If the Person can know more on his own, why doesn't he, and if he can't, how is this compatible with deity?

**(p.61)** The ideas I have canvassed here may not exhaust the ways ST might claim that the Trinity has on cognitive grounds a better claim to deity than any one person. ST might claim that in some cognitive respect other than sheer amount of knowledge, the Trinity is a whole 'greater than the sum of its parts': say, that the Trinity as a whole has important emergent epistemic properties. Searle explains two sorts of emergent property thus:

> Suppose we have a system *S*, made up of elements *a, b, c,*….For example, S might be a stone and the elements might be molecules. In general, there will be features of S that are not, or not necessarily, features of *a, b, c,*….For example, S might weigh ten pounds, but the molecules individually do not weigh ten pounds. Let us call such features 'system features'.…Some system features can be deduced…from the features of *a, b, c,*…just from the ways these are composed or arranged (and sometimes from their relations to the rest of the environment). Examples of these would be shape, weight and velocity. But other system features…have to be explained in terms of the causal interaction among the elements. Let's call these 'causally emergent system features.' Solidity, liquidity and transparency are examples of causally emergent system features….

> This conception of causal emergence…has to be distinguished from a much more adventurous conception (on which a system as a whole) has causal powers that cannot be explained by the interactions of *a*, *b*, *c*,….[42]

Might the interactions of the Three somehow constitute a whole which while not a mind or a minded thing still has some emergent cognitive perfections? ST's friends have yet to hazard such a view, as far as I know; we must wait on their efforts.

#### Is Only the Trinity Omniscient?: The Trinity as Mind

Brown may see the Trinity as literally a knower. Brown ascribes

> self-consciousness to the social being of God…if a society is self-conscious it will also be conscious, that is, aware of itself as a distinct entity over against other actual or possible societies…though such self-consciousness…exists only…in…particular individuals. Thus, though in some ways such a society functions just like a person, there remains the most important respect in which it is not a person, namely that it has no existence in itself but only through what are already indisputably persons. (Its) self-consciousness is always a disguised, incomplete function of the form self-in-x consciousness, where x…must…be filled by some specific person before one has a complete concept capable of instantiation.[43]

Thus, Brown may see the Trinity as a sort of group mind, an agent and knower who while not a fourth Person (i.e. divine substance, or case of deity) is still more than a mere collection of Persons. But if the Trinity *has* a fourth mind, this fourth mind does not know all that each Person knows—in which case there is no clear reason to expect it to know more than any one Person does—or it knows exactly**(p.62)** what any Person knows. If there are only public truths about the Persons, each Person and the Trinity will know them all, and if all alike are omniscient about non-divine matters, all will know precisely the same things. If there are private truths about the Persons, the Trinity cannot know them, and so cannot know all that each Person knows. It will instead know all public truths, plus its own private truths. So will each Person. So why should the Trinity know more than any Person?

I thus do not see promise in the claim that the Trinity alone is fully omniscient, and ST has not yet claimed that the Trinity alone has other cognitive perfections. Let us now consider the Trinity's moral attributes.

#### Is Only the Trinity All-Good?

Brown suggests that only the Trinity as a whole is ‘all-loving’, all-just, etc.[44] While he is not wholly explicit, his thought may be that each Person has his own style of expressing moral perfection, so that only the Trinity as a whole expresses the whole of divine goodness. Again, one might read this as a claim about a collection of Persons, or as involving a group mind somehow distinct from that of any single Person. But collections are no more agents than they are knowers. So Brown's real claim, on the first option, is that the three function as one morally, and their combined action is somehow better than their individual actions would be. Perhaps one could argue this thus: the Son, acting alone, gets moral credit for doing A. If the Son does A in concert with the Father, he gets that credit *plus* credit for being cooperative with a supremely good being.

On the first option, then, Brown's move is a version of functional monotheism—of which more anon. If, on the other hand, there is a fourth mind in the Godhead, we need to hear more about its relation to the other three before we can conclude that it will inherit their virtues, or all of their virtues. Offhand, if the Three differ in moral ‘style’, it would seem at least as likely that the mind they compose would inherit only what they have in common, the rest cancelling out or somehow composing vector-sum moral qualities which might be greater than, lesser than, or even incommensurable with the Persons’.

Let us now turn to omnipotence.

#### Is Only the Trinity Omnipotent?

We want to call each Person omnipotent. If they are, Brown thinks, they can thwart each other. If they can thwart each other, they can act only in concert: ‘without…cooperation, the individual Persons would in practice have at most the power to frustrate each other's designs’.[45] But then only the Trinity as a whole (if it is an agent) is an agent whose intentions no other agent has power enough to frustrate. So the Trinity has a kind of power beyond any Person's. Yet the Persons **(p.63)** still qualify as omnipotent. According to Swinburne, this is so because each has power enough on his own to do anything logically possible,[46] and each is such that for all acts A, if he tries to do A, he succeeds.[47]Swinburne's ST preserves the intuition that a divine being cannot fail at anything he tries by claiming that it is not possible that Persons choose to frustrate one another or choose plans which other Persons will frustrate, though they have power enough so to choose.[48] ST, then, can try to combine Swinburne's claim that each Person is omnipotent (and none possibly thwarted) with Brown's thesis that since each Person has power enough to thwart the others, only the Trinity has a power no

agent has power enough to thwart.

This argument raises at least four questions. One wonders what it would be to thwart a Person's agency. One wants to know whether even an omnipotent Person truly can thwart an omnipotent Person. Despite Swinburne's definition, one wonders whether a Person whose power someone else has power enough to thwart truly is omnipotent. And one wonders, lastly, in just what sense the Trinity is an agent.

As to the first, let us say that

> (1) A thwarts B's bringing it about that P = df. B tries to bring it about that P and A brings it about that B fails, and
> (2) A brings it about that B fails = df. Either A brings it about that though B tries, B cannot contribute toward P's being the case, or A brings it about that though B contributes toward P, B fails to bring it about that P.

Under the second head, some might say that even omnipotence is not power enough to thwart an omnipotent being. For (they might say) it is broadly-logically impossible to thwart an omnipotent being. Not even omnipotence can do the broadly-logically impossible.[49] But consider this.

Both Father and Son can will that some universe exist and that no universe exist. So suppose that the Father eternally wills that there be some universe, and the Son eternally wills that there be none. On pain of contradiction, they cannot both bring about what they will. If their power is truly equal, it cannot be the case that one succeeds and the other fails. If (as a ‘compromise’) the proposition ‘some universe exists’ comes to lack a truth-value, both fail. If some other sort of stalemate ensues, then again both try but fail. So it seems easy to describe cases in which one omnipotent being thwarts another. Thus, if there are two or more discrete omnipotent beings, as in ST, one must either concede that omnipotence can be thwarted, deny that the Persons are omnipotent (precisely because one can thwart another), or hold that the situation just described is not in fact possible— that for no P can it be the case that one Person tries to bring about P and another effects it that the first one fails. The last option is clearly the most attractive theologically.

**(p.64)** Let us distinguish what God has power enough to do from what God might do.[50] God has power enough to do an act A if and only if it is the case that if God tried to do it, he might succeed. God might do A if and only if (*a*) God

has power enough to do A, (*b*) he might try to do A, and (*c*) were he to try to do it, he would still have power enough to do A. Swinburne argues that for any P, if one Person has power enough to effect it that P, the others have power enough to effect it that ¬P, and yet no Person might thwart another Person, because the Persons necessarily are disposed to cooperate.[51] This move is appealing. It avoids conceding that omnipotence can be thwarted, or a deity possibly tries but fails. It also lets us trace the limits on the Persons' use of their power to a divine perfection. While Swinburne ties it to the way that their perfect moral goodness leads them to cooperate, a different sort of ST might appeal to the Persons' *perichoresis*, or mutual indwelling. One might cash this out as: the Persons are perfectly joined, intertwined, and sympathetic, and *this* perfection rules out attempts to thwart one another.

Nevertheless, the move still has costs. If neither Father nor Son can fail, and each can will that P or that ¬P, each has power enough to restrict the other's agency. For each, by willing ¬P, can make it the case that if the other tried to bring about P, he would fail. If the Father wills that ¬P, he makes it the case that if the Son tries to bring about P, the Son tries to make the Father fail. If the Son tried this, he would fail. But the Son cannot fail either. If the Son cannot fail, and it is also the case that if he tried, He would fail, then what prevents his succeeding prevents his trying. So if the Father wills that ¬P, he keeps the Son from trying to use his power to bring about P: given that the Father has willed that ¬P, the Son is unable to try to effect P.[52] This limits the Son's agency and freedom, and being unable to use one's power sits ill with being divine. In fact, this might leave the Son less effective than we are. Each Person can try only what the others' states of will permit. If the Father wills that the Mississippi flood Louisiana, we can at least try (without avail) to stem the tide. *Because* he cannot fail, the Son cannot even try. Oddly, omnipotence hamstrings him.

Finally, in ST, it seems, the Son's power is intrinsically such as to be able to fail, even if he does not possibly fail. Suppose that the Son can bring about P if the Father permits, but the Father wills that ¬P. In every possible world in which the Father wills that ¬P, it is true that

C. if the Son tried to bring about P, he would fail.

**(p.65)** If the Father might permit the Son to bring about P, and the Son can do so if the Father permits, (C)'s antecedent is only contingently false. Thus (C) is not a trivial truth.[53] (C) is true partly due to the nature of the Son's power.[54] If (C) is true in some possible world, then even if there is no possible world in which the

Son tries to bring about P and fails, the Son's power is intrinsically such as to be able to fail. For there is an act the Son tries in some possible worlds which his power will permit to fail.

Any Person's power would be greater were no conditional of (C)'s form ever true of him. Since we can conceive that this be so, in ST, we can conceive of a greater form of power than any Person of the Trinity has. Further, if Brown's Trinity is a fourth agent, and somehow has at its disposal the Persons' powers (and just how is this supposed to work?), this is the form of power it has.

So Trinity monotheism succeeds all too well at elevating the Trinity's power beyond the Persons'. But it is hard indeed to hold that any divine being has a form or degree of power than which a greater exists, or even than which a greater is conceivable. Further, it seems a reasonable requirement that a genuinely omnipotent power be one whose use no other power is great enough to impede. If this is true, then in ST as here sketched, no Person is omnipotent at all. So the price of Trinity monotheism may include the Persons' individual omnipotence.[55]

Trinity monotheism involves many Gods even in Plantinga's sense. For even if the Persons have the same nature, different natures make the Persons and the Trinity divine: the Trinity is not the kind of thing the Persons are.[56] Further, if the Trinity has more of what makes for deity than any one Person,[57] one wonders why **(p.66)** it is not more divine than any one Person—demoting the Persons to second-class divinity.

But even if Trinity monotheism avoids talk of degrees of deity, it faces a problem. Either the Trinity is a fourth case of the divine nature, in addition to the Persons, or it is not. If it is, we have too many cases of deity for orthodoxy. If it is not, and yet is divine, there are two ways to be divine—by being a case of deity, and by being a Trinity of such cases. If there is more than one way to be divine, Trinity monotheism becomes Plantingan Arianism. But if there is in fact only one way to be divine, then there are two alternatives. One is that only the Trinity is God, and God is composed of non-divine Persons. The other is that the sum of all divine Persons is somehow not divine. To accept this last claim would be to give up Trinity monotheism altogether.

I do not see an acceptable alternative here. So I think Trinity monotheism is not a promising strategy for ST.

## ‘Group Mind’ Monotheism

Brown may see the Trinity as a sort of group mind. Other versions of ST clearly do.[58] A group mind, if there were one, would be a mind composed of other minds. If the other minds were significantly simpler than the mind they composed, we might refer to the composing minds as ‘sub-minds’ and the composed item simply as a mind, but the composed item would be a group mind all the same. In group mind ST, the Trinity has or is a divine mind composed of the Persons’ minds. There is one God in the sense that there is just one ‘minded’ being composed of all divine beings.

Group minds seem at least possible. It may even be that we each have a group mind.

#### Group Minds by Radio

Our brains somehow subserve our minds. That is, our mental states either just are brain-states or (if minds are immaterial) have important causal ties to brain-states. Our left brain hemisphere receives most of its input from and controls most activity of our bodies’ right sides; our right brain hemisphere receives most **(p.67)** of its input from and controls most activity of our bodies’ left sides. A network of nerves, the cerebral commissures, normally connects the two hemispheres. Imagine that gradually, over a period of months, surgeons replace two brains’ cerebral commissures with tiny radio transceivers, so that the hemispheres come to communicate by radio waves, not electrical impulses through nerves.[59] At the end of the process, we have four cerebral hemispheres able to send and receive radio signals, and two unified streams of conscious experience whose unity is preserved by radio. Suppose now that the hemispheres’ radio equipment is so tuned that each left hemisphere receives input from both right hemispheres. There are many ways to read the resulting situation. Perhaps we have two (initially bazed) minds, each involving three cerebral hemispheres, each with a stream of conscious experience supported by all three hemispheres. Or perhaps we now have four unshared minds, not two. For perhaps each pairing of a left and a right constitutes a distinct mind, with a conscious stream of experience private to itself. Again, perhaps we have four minds, but just two streams of conscious experience: perhaps, that is, we have two pairs of minds which share numerically the same conscious experiences. Or we could have as many as six minds. Perhaps the four pairings of brain hemispheres each constitute a mind, and the two sharings of conscious experience bring into being further, group minds emerging from the four. We could choose among these alternatives by asking questions and observing the

behaviour of those whose brains we have thus connected. Some patterns of answers and actions would favour group-mind hypotheses.[60]

#### Cerebral Commissurotomy

One treatment for severe epilepsy involves surgically severing the commissures. Patients receiving this treatment sometimes behave as if their cerebral hemispheres are operating largely independently. Nagel reports experimental results:

> if the word ‘hat’ is flashed on the left, the left hand will retrieve a hat from a group of concealed objects if the person is told to pick out what he has seen. At the same time he will insist verbally that he saw nothing. Or, if two different words are flashed to the two half(-visual) Welds (e.g. ‘pencil’ and ‘toothbrush’) and the individual is told to retrieve the corresponding object from beneath a screen, with both hands, then the hands will search the collection of objects independently, the right hand picking up the pencil and discarding it while the left hand searches for it, and the left hand similarly rejecting the toothbrush which the right hand lights upon with satisfaction. …One particularly poignant example of conflict between the hemispheres is as follows. A pipe is placed out of sight in the patient's left hand, and he is then asked to write with his left hand what he was holding. Very laboriously…the left hand writes the letters P and I. Then suddenly, the writing speeds up and becomes lighter, the I is converted to an E, and the word is completed as PENCIL. Evidently the left hemisphere has made a guess based on the appearance of the **(p.68)** first two letters, and has interfered, with ipsilateral control. But then the right hemisphere takes over control of the hand again, heavily crossing out the letters ENCIL, and draws a crude picture of a pipe.[61]

There is controversy over how to interpret such results.[62] But one very reasonable reading of them is that following the surgery, the patients’ hemisphere constitute two distinct functioning minds, which ordinarily so cooperate that the patient is not conscious of the split, but can be brought to act independently. If this is the right reading, the next question becomes whether these minds were in fact discrete prior to the surgery—whether, that is, an ordinary human mind is in fact a linking of two in-principle independent sub-minds, one in each hemisphere, which normally ‘fuse’ via the cerebral commissures. This is at least a viable hypothesis. If it is true, the ordinary human mind is a group mind.

I suggest, then, that the notion of a group mind makes some sense. We may each

have some first-hand knowledge of what a group mind is like; if we do not, we can at least describe circumstances in which it could be reasonable to believe that a group mind exists. The question, though, is whether the notion of a group mind provides a way for ST to qualify as monotheist.

I see three ways trinitarians might deploy the notion of a group mind. One could hold it to be a fourth divine mind, somehow emergent from the Persons', as Brown seems to do. This is just Trinity monotheism again.

One could instead liken the Trinity's group mind to our own mind, seeing it as the one 'real' divine mind, a single integrated system somehow emerging from sub-minds with no real independence. This certainly gives us a single God in a strong sense. But it denigrates the Persons: is something fully personal if it has only a sub-mind integrated fully into a more encompassing mind, even if the sub-mind has divine capabilities? Certainly something is not fully personal if it cannot refer to itself as 'I', i.e. is not self-aware. But if we have sub-minds, then before (say) commissurotomy renders them independent, they cannot refer to themselves as 'I'.[63] So on this alternative, there is just one 'I' in God—and so no real intra-trinitarian 'sociality' or love. For if we ourselves have discrete sub-minds, then as far as we can tell, they do not keep each other company or love each other. This forfeits one major motivation for ST, the desire to find true, perfect love in God's inner life. Finally, this move also seems to invert orthodoxy, giving us not three Persons in one substance but one Person in three substances.[64]

If there are four minds in God, Trinitarian monotheism looms. If there is but one, the Trinity is unsocial. Williams may try to slide between these alternatives.[65] Perhaps (he speculates) the Persons' minds are wholly open to one another, as if by telepathy. Perhaps their minds so mingle that though they are three, there is **(p.69)** literally but one thought between them, and when they act, there are not three cooperating actions, but one action: the Persons literally 'will the same thing with the same will (and) act in one and the same act…the wills of the divine Persons are…a unanimity which is actually a unity…the will of the lover and the beloved coincide so completely that there is a single act of willing.'[66]

In this scenario, no fourth mind emerges from three. Nor (it may be) do the Persons' minds collapse into one.[67] Instead, there are three minds in the Trinity, but there is just one set of divine mental states, with three subjects. This violates our ordinary ways of individuating mental states, but then we expect the doctrine

of the Trinity to be unusual in some way. Perhaps for Williams, each Person has his own mind, but there is but one content of consciousness between the three, and it depends equally on the thinking activity of all. Suppose one wires a light bulb to two power sources, either sufficient to light the bulb alone. One trips the switches, and electricity from the two reaches the bulb precisely at once. What then powers the bulb? It is not either power source alone. All we can say is that the two together overdetermine the bulb's lighting up. In such cases, the joint effect has not two individual causes, but a single joint cause, the compound of the two. So too, perhaps the Persons' mental states and thought-contents literally belong only to the Trinity as a whole, not to the individual Persons as such—in which case perhaps their intentions and acts do as well.

If this is Williams's view, it raises a puzzle and a nest of problems. The puzzle is this. We can make sense of commingled human minds remaining distinct, even if they somehow partake in the same consciousness, because we can associate them with different (groupings of) brain hemispheres. But what would keep Williams's discarnate minds distinct? If they do not differ in mental state, presumably their non-identity rests on or involves their not sharing some other, non-mental sort of state. But we do not know what kind of non-mental states discarnate minds have. So we really have no way to fill out Williams's picture. We do not know whether what he describes is possible or not.

The other puzzle concerns first-person mental states. If three minds share one such state—say, a tokening of 'I am'—to whom or what does its 'I' refer? 'I' always refers to its own tokener. For Williams, the Persons, not the Trinity, do the tokening. The Trinity is not identical with any one Person. So no Person's 'I' can refer to the Trinity. Nor then can the 'I' they share. That the Persons token 'I' as one, as a Trinity, does not affect this point. For it does not alter the fact that *they* token it. But if the Persons have just one mental state among them, it is unclear how any one Person could refer just to himself. What would the 'I' in their common state refer (say) to the Son rather than the Spirit? If their common state's 'I' does not refer to just one Person or to the Trinity, the last alternative (it seems) is that it refers to all three Persons. But a token of 'I' cannot refer to many speakers. Doing so is the job of 'we', not 'I'. The 'I' puzzle opens out into many **(p.70)** more. For instance, the Son willed to become incarnate. When he willed that, did the whole Trinity will 'I shall become incarnate'? If it did, not just the Son but the whole Trinity became incarnate.[68] Or did the whole Trinity will 'the Son shall become incarnate'? The Son could not learn from that that *he* would become incarnate unless he could also think to himself, in effect, 'I am

the Son, so *I* shall become incarnate'.[69] But in Williams's account, it is hard to see how the Son could do so.

The problems come with the claim that all thoughts, intentions, and actions of God belong to the Trinity as a whole. For then it seems the Trinity, not the Second Person, does all that Christ does. But if the whole Trinity, not the Son, does the act of becoming incarnate, then not only the Son but the whole Trinity becomes incarnate. This is theologically unacceptable. Again, if the Father as well as the Son is the subject of all mental states involved in Christ's being on the Cross, not just the Son but the Father 1st-person feels the nails go in, the thorns dig into Jesus' brow, and so on. So Williams's view seems to commit him to Patripassianism. Again, orthodoxy has it that the Father begets the Son. In Williams's proposal, not just the Father but the Son does the begetting—and so the Son brings himself to be. Further, presumably the Father begets the Son intentionally.[70] So the Father intends to beget the Son, and so in Williams's proposal, the Son intends this too—causally before he exists.[71] Williams can avoid this and like impossibilities only by denying the trinitarian processions. So his view is either impossible or (again) theologically unacceptable. Finally, Williams's view entails threefold over-determination of every divine act *ad extra*, i.e. that in each divine act, each Person individually does enough that if the other two did not act, the act's effect would take place just as it actually does. It is not clear how to square this with the Incarnation. For it is surely not true that if the Son did not act at all, the Son would become incarnate just as he actually did.

## Functional Monotheism

Group mind monotheism seems unpromising. Trinity monotheism runs into trouble (I have argued) by trying to make the Trinity more properly divine than the Persons. Swinburne takes the opposite tack, contending that the Persons are more properly divine than the Trinity, as it is they 'who to speak strictly…have **(p.71)** the divine properties of omnipotence, omniscience, etc., though…if all members of a group know something the group itself, by a very natural extension of use, can be said to know that thing, and so on'.[72] 'Extension' of use indeed. Collections do not literally have knowledge at all. So saying that the collective has knowledge can only be a way to say that its members do. Swinburne suggests that we so treat all the Trinity's divinizing attributes. So for him, the Trinity's being divine is just the Persons', i.e. talk of the Trinity being divine is just elliptical for talk of the Persons' being so. The Trinity as a distinct

locus of divinity drops out altogether. For Swinburne, ‘the Trinity’ is not a singular term referring to something divine. If it is a singular term, it refers to a ‘group’ (above) or ‘collective’ (below)—a set, or perhaps a mereological sum. No set is divine, and if the Persons have a sum, this by itself no more makes them ‘really’ one divine being than having a mereological sum makes all trout ‘really’ one trout. For Swinburne, ‘the Trinity’ may really be a plural term (like ‘Bob and Carol and Ted’), referring to three divine things without treating them as one of anything. Whether the term be singular or plural, in Swinburne's account, use of ‘the Trinity’ makes ST no more monotheistic than ST would be if we eschewed such use, and instead used only ‘the three Persons’.

For Swinburne, ST is monotheistic because

> the three divine individuals…form a collective source of the being of all other things (and are) totally mutually dependent and necessarily jointly behind each other's acts. This collective (is) indivisible in its being for logical reasons—that is…each of its members is necessarily everlasting and would not have existed unless it had brought about or been brought about by the others. The collective (is) also…indivisible in its causal action in the sense that each (backs) totally the causal action of the others…this very strong unity of the collective would make it, as well as its individual members, an appropriate object of worship. The claim that ‘there is only one God’ is to be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity.[73]

One who worships addresses someone. So worship makes sense only if directed to someone who can be aware of being addressed. Collections are not conscious, nor are mereological sums conscious as such.[74] So one cannot really appropriately worship Swinburne's collective, save as a way to worship its members. But Swinburne's meaning is plain. As he sees it, ‘there is one God’ is really a transform of ‘God is one’, and ‘God is one’ states not the quantity but the quality of divine **(p.72)** things. It asserts that the Persons exhibit unity, i.e. that they always function *ad extra* as one.[75] For Swinburne, then, ST is a *functional* monotheism.

How unified are the Persons of functional-monotheist ST? They all instance the same nature. They all have almost the same almost-omniscient knowledge. This includes all morally relevant knowledge, and so (one presumes) all concrete moral perceptions. They share the same perfect moral character, ideal wisdom, and rationality, and the same great inclinations to love and faithfulness. Thus,

Plantinga infers that the Persons are by nature mutually loyal and loving—as absolutely so, one may add, as their moral perfection dictates.[76] There is in addition something like a family relation between them, if one takes seriously credal claims that the Father 'begets' the Son, and the two together bring the Spirit to be.[77]So one can reasonably expect the Three to share not only an essence (as any three humans do) but such contingent properties as family members share: and surely the omnipotent Father will do far better in imprinting traits harmonious with his one Son and Spirit than parents do in moulding their offspring in their likeness. Again, genetically identical human twins may differ in personality if brought up differently, but there is *in divinis* nothing like upbringing to account for this. In fact, the Three are never separated in any way, as human parents and offspring are. Instead they somehow eternally 'interpenetrate' one another.[78] So it is not clear that ST's Persons could differ in personality, and Persons so perfectly alike might never (one may think) hatch different plans of action. But even if ST's Persons did somehow form different goals, the factors just listed doubtlessly would make them try to work them out as not to impede the others' projects. Swinburne speculates that a further moral tie might bind the Persons: if the Father is the Son and Spirit's ultimate source of being, He would have the moral right to set terms for the Three's cooperation, and Son and Spirit would respect these out of love, gratitude, and moral acknowledgement of their indebtedness.[79] Thus, the ST's Persons act as one *ad extra* by perfect cooperation flowing from their internal relations. If the Persons are a plurality or family of Gods, they are far from the sort of strife that gave the Olympian family a bad name.

Still, even perfect cooperation is cooperation. This introduces a kind of conflict within each individual divine Person, though not between them—at least in versions of ST in which the Persons cooperate. For each obtains the good of the others' society at the cost of having henceforth so to act as to avoid conflict with what the others do: the good of sharing in love has a price in terms of the good of **(p.73)** freedom of action. This is particularly clear in Swinburne's version of ST, in which Persons cede each other distinct spheres of influence.[80]

I now point out a number of oddities that follow if the Persons are one only functionally. I then try to press functional monotheism towards making clear what I think is in fact its basic claim, that a religion's number of divine beings is irrelevant to 'what really matters' about being monotheist. Once this claim is on the table, I try to show against it that sheer number does not count. This brings me to the end of my campaign specifically against the functional-monotheist

move. I then raise two sorts of problem that apply to any version of ST.

#### Some Oddities

For Swinburne, we call the Trinity 'God' only by 'extension of use'.[81] But this is an awkward claim. If it is true, those who use 'God' to address a prayer to its hearer err as one would who addressed the holders of a joint Presidency as 'Mr. President'[82]—or else unknowingly address only one of the Three. So too, the voice from the burning bush should have introduced itself as 'We Are', not 'I Am'—or else we should enquire which of the Three spoke there, or conclude that the 'I' of 'I am' is ambiguous. All this is quite unintuitive, as it is to suppose that the Old Testament prophets who thundered that God is one (and whose monotheism Christians inherit) meant only that pagans preached a few too many divine beings, and did not know how alike, akin, and in accord all divine beings truly are.

In Swinburne's view, the Creed's 'the Father is God' and 'they are…one God' use 'God' in different senses. 'The Father is God' tells us what kind of thing the Father is, and that the Father instances deity. 'They are…one God' does not say that the three instance deity, or say what kind of thing they are. The Three collectively are *not* anything which instances deity (though they are a collection of items instancing deity). Instead, 'they are…one God' tells us how the Three act. But the Creed's 'and yet they are not three Gods, but one God' suggests otherwise. If 'God' does not occur in the same sense in 'the Father is God' (etc.) and 'they are…one God', why the 'and yet…but'?[83] Moreover, 'and yet they **(p.74)** are…one God' strongly suggests that 'one' occurs in a sense which contradicts 'three'. But 'three' gives the quantity of Persons. So being 'not three Gods' also seems a matter of quantity—in which case being one God is too.

Swinburne suggests that the Creed 'in denying…that there are three Gods (denies) that there (are) three*independent* divine beings, any of which could exist without the other, or which could act independently of each other.'[84] Can this be what the Creed means? If the Persons have non-overlapping ranges of power, then they *can* act independently of one another: that is, none can block or undo anything the others can do. So if the Persons cannot act independent of one another, their ranges of power overlap: some can block or undo what the others do. But if some can block or undo what the others do, that none can act independently of the rest is trivially true. For none can effect what he wishes unless the others do not block or undo it. Each depends for success on the others' restraint, just because all are omnipotent. In fact, if all are omnipotent, then (*per*

our earlier treatment of thwarting omnipotence) none can even try to act unless the others' states of will permit it.

The Persons thus would be 'not three Gods', on Swinburne's account, even if in fact most of their purposes were always opposed. For all that would follow from this would be that each has many purposes he cannot even try to achieve (or, if the treatment of thwarting omnipotence was not sound, at least that some acts some of them try do not succeed), and that each achieves some subset of his purposes on which the Three agree. If this is right, then an omnipotent Zeus, Hera, and Venus, constantly at odds, would satisfy one clause of the 'not three Gods' condition. Further, were Zeus *et al*. necessary beings, they would satisfy the full condition. But it is not plausible that one can make Greek paganism a belief in 'not many gods, but one' by adding to it the claims that the gods are omnipotent and necessary.

#### Monotheist Paganism?

Let us consider paganism further. For Christian orthodoxy, the Father 'begets' the Son and 'breathes' the Spirit.[85] So on the functional-monotheist account, the reason the Persons are one God and the Olympians are not is that the Persons are far more alike than Zeus and his brood, far more cooperative, and linked by procession. But it is hardly plausible that Greek paganism would have been a form of monotheism had Zeus & Co. been more alike, better behaved, and linked by the right causal relations. Suppose that Zeus, frustrated with his Olympian cohorts, wipes them out one by one and gradually replaces them with gods qualitatively just like himself, begotten out of his own substance (from his forehead, as with Athena) and sustained by his power. In the end, we have a Greek religion in which Zeus is king of the gods, Zeus-2 is god of war, Zeus-3 is god of metallurgy, etc. Has Greek religion now become monotheist? Surely not. **(p.75)** Or—if one insists that gods with temporal beginnings cannot count as Gods—vary the picture, so that for any time, before that time Zeus had begotten all his doubles. The result is the same.

Perhaps (a friend of ST may say) the reason even *this* modified paganism does not seem monotheist is that it worships gods, not Gods. Now even if we accept this explanation, there is still this point: if Swinburne's are the right conditions for a religion's having just one God, parallel conditions should entail that Greek religion has just one god. But I am not sure the gods/Gods explanation holds up. A religion which acknowledged only one god, Zeus, would seem monotheist to me; if this is right, gods vs. Gods is not a relevant difference. Further, the gods/Gods reply entails that we should be able to make the beliefs of our modified

paganism monotheist by stipulating that Zeus and his doubles are omnipotent, exist with an appropriate sort of necessity, and have the rest of Swinburne's deifying attributes. My own intuition is that we cannot. If we make these last changes in paganism, it may become ‘functionally monotheist’. In fact, it might look just like Swinburnean STwith the number of Persons expanded to equal the number of Olympians. But to me, at least, there seems a gap between this and being monotheist *simpliciter* : if we started with polytheism, we have it still. It does not seem that we can make a religion monotheist merely by altering its gods’ *nature*. If a notion as recondite as ‘monotheism’ has an intuitive content, that content seems to have something to do with the bare number of a religion's deities. And if there is an upper numerical bound for being monotheists*impliciter*, one wonders why three instances of deity are not too many.

Again, suppose that Christianity counts as monotheist by meeting conditions on the Persons’ links of origin, necessity of existence, likeness of nature, and agreement in action. Then if it failed one of these conditions, Christianity would not be monotheist. Thus, Swinburne's account entails that since Father and Son always agree, Christianity is monotheist, but if they disagreed (and how much?), it would not be. This is not plausible. Deities’ conduct does not seem the sort of thing that makes a religion monotheist. If it were, there would have to be good answers to such questions as these: why must gods disagree, rather than just differ in will, to make a religion polytheist? Just how much divine disagreement makes a religion polytheist? Is there a sharp cutoff point for monotheism? (If there is not, then there can be religions which are neither mono- nor poly-theist, since of course there is a continuous scale of degrees of divine likeness and behavioural conformity.) Where does it come? Why just there? These do not look like questions with plausible answers.

#### A Question of Number

Either there is or there is not a maximum number of Gods a religion can tolerate while being monotheist. If two other cases of deity proceed from the Father and yet there is one God (in the Creed's sense), would there be just one God if a million did? It is no reply to say, 'the Father necessarily gives rise only to the Son and the Spirit, and so we can ignore the conditional

> **(p.76)** I. were the Father to give rise to a million deities just as he does the Son, there would be one God (in the sense of the Creed).

due to its impossible antecedent’. Some such conditionals express important

theological truths, and can be subjects of genuine controversy. Consider the claims

> were God to try to destroy himself, he would succeed,
> were God to try to destroy himself, he would fail,
> were God to try to sin, he would succeed, and
> were God to try to sin, he would fail.

Intuitively, not all are true;[86] and intuitively, a full Christian theology cannot ignore the question of which ones are true. (I), I suggest, is a conditional that discussions of ST cannot ignore. Further, (I) has a relative with a quite possible antecedent,

> Ia. were Christianity to hold that the Father gives rise to a million deities just as he does the Son in ST, Christianity would be monotheistic.

(Ia) seems implausible to me.

If there is no upper bound on the number of Gods a religion can tolerate and yet be monotheist, then a religion with an infinity of Gods could be monotheist. But I for one baulk at this. It is not all that intuitive wholly to separate functional and numerical monotheism. One is nagged by a sense that a religion of infinite Gods could not be any sort of monotheism, howsoever much they spoke as one. If an infinity of Gods will not do, there is an upper numerical bound on monotheism, be it sharp or vague. If the maximum for monotheism is not one God, this demands explaining (just what in the concept of monotheism would set a bound other than ‘one’?), as do such claims as that there is a bound at all if it is not one, that it is just the number that it is, and that three Gods are not too many. If there is a maximum number of divine beings a monotheist religion can tolerate, and it is one, then (of course) ST is not a version of monotheism.

#### The Obvious Comeback

The last two sections have tried, inter alia, to elicit and strengthen one intuition, that there is more to monotheism than functional monotheism—or, put elsewise, **(p.77)** that whether a religion is monotheist has something to do with the number of deities it acknowledges. At this point, the friend of ST may ask just why sheer number of Gods should matter. If one's Gods act as one, if it is not possible that two Gods place one under conflicting obligations, if there can be no conceivable situation in which loyalty to one conflicts with loyalty to all, surely (ST will argue) that is the main thing. The claim that all cases of deity are identical is worth making only because it is an obvious way to assure all this.

Assure the religious consequences of monotheism without identifying all cases of deity—assure qualitative monotheism without quantitative—and there is no further reason to care whether all cases of deity are identical. 'What matters' about monotheism really has nothing to do with number.[87] I think this may be the root thought of the 'functional monotheist' move. Functional-monotheist ST may assert it directly, or may do so by redefining polytheism functionally, taking it as 'really' the view that the gods or Gods may disagree, or even (with Yandell) as 'the view that…there are various divine or quasi-divine beings all of whom lack omnipotence, omniscience, full creatorhood and full providentiality; they divide the world between themselves with each taking care of part of it…or the like.'[88]

In reply, I now try to show that sheer number does matter, at least in Christianity.

#### Why Number Matters: The Law and the Prophets

The Law tells us to 'hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one' (Deut. 6: 4). Jesus tells us that He came not to destroy but to complete, perfect, or fulfil the Law (Matt. 5: 17).[89] I think this lays down a condition Christian theology must meet: the Christian version of monotheism should complete, perfect, or fulfil its Jewish version. It should be a monotheism a Jew could accept as monotheistic, and a completion of Jewish monotheism.[90] Failing that, it should come as close to this as trinitarian orthodoxy permits. Being monotheist both qualitatively and quantitatively is closer than just being monotheist only qualitatively.

Again, a proper successor to Jewish monotheism ought to be such that a religious allegiance divided between the Persons makes no sense. That is, its God ought to be one in such a way that divided allegiance is as conceptually incoherent as a divided allegiance to the God of Judaism would be. This is clearly not so in ST's case. It may be that ST's Persons would never demand exclusive loyalty, and would even demand that one's loyalty be to all alike. But still, if Father, Son, and Spirit are discrete substances, there is conceptual space to think **(p.78)** of being loyal to just one. Were there not, one could not so much as discuss why this would never actually be a problem. LT does not allow such conceptual space. For LT, being loyal to any Person is *just* one way to be loyal to the same divine being. There is no second discrete divine being to whom loyalty might be directed.

#### Why Number Matters: Power

As we have seen, if there is more than one discrete being with the full divine nature, each such being suffers restrictions of freedom, agency, and power. The

question also arises of how and to what extent their actions are coordinated. The three either do or do not restrict one another's ranges of action etc. equally. If they do not, this is a substantive inequality between them, threatening degrees and distinct kinds of deity. If they do, one must say why, since it is not an especially likely result. Swinburne suggests that the Father lays down the conditions which coordinate the Three.[91] But if any one Person does this, it constitutes (again) a serious inequality among the Three. If no one Person does this, there is no guarantee that the Three wind up placing equal restriction on one another.[92]

#### Why Number Matters: Action

Again, in the Three's acts *ad extra*, either each Person has a distinct sphere of activity, in which the others do not act, or their agency overlaps. But talk of distinct spheres of activity yields an uncomfortably Olympian model of life within the Trinity. If (say) the Son alone rules the weather, it seems to follow that the Son is more specially the God of weather than other Persons, and that those who depend especially on the weather owe the Son more worship than they owe the others. This is not what the tradition makes of apparent acts of just one Person—say, the Son's incarnation. Traditionally, in these acts, the other Persons support the one in the foreground: the Father sends and the Spirit empowers the Son. So traditionally, it is not the case that the Son is the (sole) God of salvation.

**(p.79)** Yet—to digress a moment—it is hard to see how ST can avoid at least a soupçon of Olympus. If the Persons are discrete, and only the Son died for our sins, then however much the Father and Spirit helped out, it seems that the Son did more for us than the other two, who neither bled nor suffered. If the others shared the Son's experience so completely as to make the claim that they bled appropriate, it would be hard to say why it is not the case that not just the Son but all three Persons were incarnate. So it is hard to see how we could fail to owe the Son more than we owe the other two. This issue arises solely because ST's Persons are three discrete substances. If so, LT faces nothing like this issue. For in LT, there is just one substance to whom we owe anything for our salvation, God. There can be a question of unequal loyalty or debt to two discrete divine substances. There cannot be a question of unequal loyalty or debt to one and the same substance.

Back to the main track. If we do not wish to assign the Persons fields of sole agency, we must consider how three discrete divine Persons might participate in one divine activity. There are four ways this might occur. It could be that one Person makes the largest contribution, with the others merely supporting or

cooperating.[93] It could be that all three Persons contribute partly but equally. It could be that the Three overdetermine the divine action, each of them contributing enough on his own to fully account for the divine effect. Or, as in Williams, it could be that the three Persons together just are one agent, in the sense they make not three distinct contributions, however related, but just one contribution among them. So to say: the Father acts, the Son acts, and the Spirit acts, and yet there are not in any sense three acts, but one act. Any act-token which is the Father's is equally and fully the Son's and Spirit's, without overdetermination, partial contribution, etc.

We rejected the last two options above. Equal or unequal partial responsibility for a divine effect could mean that each Person causes an equal or unequal part of the effect. Or it could mean that while no part of the effect is assignable to any one Person alone, the three Persons together account for the whole of a single effect, so acting in such a way that none individually would have sufficed to cause it and all together just suffice to cause it.

The options which say that each Person causes some discrete part of the divine effect give us just another variant of the Olympian problem. If (say) the Father makes the left third of the rainbow, the Son its middle, and the Spirit its right, whom to thank for it (or thank most for it[94]) depends on which part you have in mind. Things differ given LT. In LT, the Son is not *discrete* from the other Persons. For the Son to be in the forefront of an act is just for God to be more prominent in one role (or state, etc.) than he is in others. So thanking the Son is thanking the same individual God who is Father and Spirit. We cannot owe God more thanks than we owe God.

**(p.80)** It is hard to make sense of the second version of the partial responsibility options. Consider God declaring '*fiat lux*' and having *lux* shine, or parting the Red Sea. Just what could a one-third-of-sufficient contribution to either *be*? After all, it is not as if God parts the Sea by pushing, so that each Person can contribute one-third of the total force needed. God parts the Sea by deciding that it shall be parted. One may well wonder how a Person could make a one-third contribution to a mental event of deciding. As acts of LT's Persons are just acts of God, LT need not try to make sense of this.

Still, there may be a kind of STwhich can make sense of this, and that is a group mind ST in which the Persons are or have fully submerged sub-systems or sub-minds composing a fully integrated mind which belongs to the Trinity—one in which the Trinity's group mind is like a single human mind. But this move has a

steep theological price. If every Person makes just some less-than-full contribution to a trinitarian mental act, no individual Person ever accounts fully for any mental act—none ever individually makes a full decision, or has a full thought, or does a full action. If so, none is ever fully a person, for none has a full mind. So this move's price would be the Persons' full personhood. It would be hard to square this with the Persons' full deity and perfection, or (again) the 'social' note of ST.

#### Why Number Matters: The 'Why this many' Question

The question 'why does deity have the number of cases it has?' is live for ST in a way it is not for LT. For LT, there is just one case of deity. Told that there is just one, we do not feel a need to ask why there are not more. Nor (if we did ask) would this be hard to explain. For if a being is a case of deity, nothing distinct from that being exists unless that being creates it, and (we think) one cannot create cases of deity. To ask why there are not fewer cases of deity would be to ask why there is a God, rather than none. Theists are near unanimous that this question does not arise, that the existence of God is a truly adequate stopping-point for explanation.[95] One might also ask 'well, let's not suppose that there is one God. A *priori*, there might be any number of Gods. So why should there be just one, not more?' In answer, LT can argue in many ways that there simply cannot be many cases of deity.[96]

In ST, none of this holds. Given that there are three cases of deity, we do wonder why just three, not more. Nor (I argue below) can ST reply with an argument that cases of deity cannot be created: unless ST denies the other Persons' procession from the Father, in which case the arbitrariness of there eternally, necessarily being three wholly independent cases of deity becomes all **(p.81)** the sharper. Nor can STanswer the a *priori* number-question with arguments that there cannot be many cases of deity.[97] Finally, in ST, the 'why not fewer?' question is wholly legitimate. For it can have the sense 'does anything about deity dictate having more than two instances, and if not, does anything *else*explain this?'

As far as I know, only Swinburne among ST's friends tries to say why there should be just three cases of deity—strictly, why given at least one, there should be just three. Swinburne thinks that what drives the production of Persons is that God is perfectly loving by nature:

> Love is a supreme good. Love involves sharing…and love involves co-operating with another to benefit third parties. There would be something

> deeply unsatisfactory (even if for inadequate humans sometimes unavoidable) about a marriage in which the parties were concerned solely with each other and did not use their mutual love to bring forth good to others.[98]

Perfect love, Swinburne thinks, requires three but does not require four:

> The reason why it was an overall good that the first divine individual should bring about the second was that otherwise there would be none with whom to cooperate in sharing totally; and the reason why it was an overall good that the first and second divine individuals should bring about a third was that otherwise there would be no one with whom to cooperate in sharing totally.…My ethical intuitions are inevitably highly fallible here, but it seems to me that co-operating with two others in sharing is not essential to the manifestation of love so long as co-operation with one in sharing is going on. There is a qualitative difference between sharing and co-operating in sharing…but, as it seems to me, no similar qualitative difference between co-operating with one in sharing and cooperating with two.[99]

Swinburne concludes that if perfect love does not require four, then deity does not require it, and it is impossible to bring about a divine individual other than by nature.[100] Yet many parents expand their families beyond a single child because forms of love become possible with greater complexity which are not possible given only one child, or because there is something very good about a child having a sibling, and about together teaching that child to share in love for that sibling, or because there are peculiar joys to (say) taking a large brood rather than an only child on a family vacation or involving a bigger band in family chores. If marital and familial analogies have a place in thinking about the inner life of God, why shouldn't this one? Cooperating with two to love yet another is a greater 'balancing act' than cooperating with one to love yet another. It requires kinds of diplomacy and interaction which cooperation with one does not. It has its own unique values. Why would these values not matter as much as those **(p.82)** unique to the three-membered relation? And why would the point that a 'love unit' is less than perfect if it remains wholly self-absorbed apply to pairs but not trios, or apply less forcefully to a trio?[101]

Since the present question is a live one for ST, one cannot but applaud Swinburne for tackling it. But it still seems to me that trinitarians should prefer LT, in which 'why this many' questions either do not arise or have better

answers.

Such, then, is my case against the third of our strategies for showing ST monotheist. I now turn to problems facing not just the functional monotheist, but any version of ST.

## III A Created God?

The Nicene Creed requires Christians to hold that the Son is ‘begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God’. If Father and Son are distinct substances, there are only two ways to understand this.[102] One would be to say that the Father separates off some portion of His own substance and forms the Son from it.[103] But as the Father is not made of any stuff, this cannot be true. The other is to say that the Father creates the Son *ex nihilo*. Thus, Swinburne, in his first account of the Trinity, wrote that

> there is overriding reason for a first God to create a second God and with him to create a third God;[104]
>
> unity of action could be secured if the first God solemnly vows to the second God in creating him that he will not frustrate any action of his.… The creation of the second God by the first of which I am speaking is an everlasting creation; at each moment of endless time the first God keeps in being the second God.[105]

**(p.83)** It is hard to see how STwhich includes divine ‘begetting’ can avoid the claim that the Father creates the Son *ex nihilo*. For in ST, the Son comes to exist as one more instance of a nature which pre-exists Him. (The Father bears it logically or causally if not temporally before the Son does.) We do not hesitate to call anything else of which this is true a creature; Thomists would say that any such item has a nature ‘really composed’ with its existence, and that this is the mark of createdness.[106] If the Father creates the Son, Arius was right in at least one particular: the Son is a creature (though one nearer the Father in status than any other).[107] The Creed's ‘begotten, not made’, must for ST have the sense ‘not only made, but begotten’.

Further, ‘created God’ is at best an oxymoron.[108] It may be worse. For we tend to see the line between the divine and the non- as that which separates the uncreated and the created.[109] Again, particularly when cosmological arguments for God's existence are in view, we tend to mean by ‘God’ (or at least use to fix

its reference) something like ‘uncreated creator of all else’. But if two members of a collection are created, the collection as a whole is created: it comes to exist only once all its members come to exist. So if the Trinity has created members, it is itself a creature, not in this sense God, and *not* the uncreated creator of all else.

One ‘fix’ for this would be to see cosmological arguments as inferring the existence only of the Father, the uncreated God, rather than the full Trinity, or more generally to see creation as primarily the Father's work. Swinburne may have this in mind when he writes that Christians hold that ‘our…universe derived its being from a single *personal* source of being, possessed of all perfection’,[110] for on his showing, the Trinity is not a personal source of being, but instead a ‘*collective* source of the being of all other things’.[111] Again, Swinburne relates *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence to the doctrine of the Trinity thus: ‘the data which suggest that there is a God suggest that the most probable kind of God…inevitably…becomes tripersonal…the doctrine of the Trinity is not a more complicated hypothesis than the hypothesis of a sole divine **(p.84)** individual; the simplest sort of God to whom arguments lead inevitably triper-sonalizes.’[112] The God who ‘becomes tripersonal’ is for Swinburne the Father, for prior to the Son and Spirit's existing (God's ‘tripersonalizing’), deity exists only in the Father. So the picture one gets here is that natural theology infers the Father's existence, and further reasoning shows that the Son and Spirit also exist. But Colossians 1: 16–17 and Hebrews 1: 2–3 give the Son as full a share as the Father in creation and sustaining.[113] So a Christian would expect natural theology to conclude to an acting God who is all three Persons (though not under that description)—as it does in LT.

The created-God problem does not arise for LT. For in LT, one single substance, God, underlies the three Persons. And nothing in the models requires us to say that this one God creates Himself.

## IV An Inequality Problem

In the models of LT I have given, if the Father did not beget the Son, there would be neither Son nor Father, but only God. In ST, it seems, if *per impossibile* the Father did not beget and spirate the Son and Spirit, the Father would exist, and deity would exist only in Him. For ST, that is, were there no Trinity, the Father would be identical with God. This conditional has a necessarily false antecedent, according to Christians, but I would argue that it is all the same not a trivial truth,[114] and it makes the Son's and Spirit's existence less intrinsic to God's than

the Father's. So even if ST somehow dodges the problem of created Gods, it is left with a substantive inequality between the Persons. By contrast, in LT, were there no processions, there would be no Persons, but simply God. The Persons are wholly equal: as ought to be so if they are equally divine. And yet on the accounts above, the Father does have a relevant priority. For given that there *are* Persons, the others exist because the Father does.

Still other things point to the inequality of ST's Persons.

The Father's unique causal role seems a relevant respect in which he is greater than the Son and Spirit, if they are discrete substances. For if it makes God (as a whole) greater than the world to be its total and sustaining source, and to be causally 'before it', then being their total and sustaining source and causally before them makes the Father greater than the other Persons.[115] Further, this seems **(p.85)** relevant to being divine. So ST's Father seems to have more of what makes for divinity than the other two Persons.

Again, as noted earlier, we tend to think that part of what makes God divine is not being created: we tend, that is, to see being uncreated as a deifying attribute. If it is, then if the Father is uncreated while the Son is created, the Son lacks a deifying attribute the Father has. The Son may be eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, etc. But still there is real reason to say that the Father has more of what makes an item divine than the Son.

Again, one can make a strong case that ultimacy—being absolutely the first being—is itself a deifying attribute.[116] If it is, this too is a deifying attribute the Father has and the Son lacks.

To see another relevant respect of greatness, we must consider the concept of deity. God is divine just in case he satisfies the concept of deity. You may ask, whose concept of deity? I will beg many questions and answer, the right one. The right concept of deity (as it were) embodies the standards by which one would judge correctly what things are divine. It tells one what a thing ought to be if it aspires to deity. Let us now ask an odd, abstract question. What sets the content of the right concept of deity? How is it determined what an item must be to count as truly divine?

There are just two answers to this question. The content might somehow be set independent of God. Or the content might somehow depend on God.

Theists will not tolerate the first answer. For on it, there is an abstract template,

independent of God, to which God must conform to count as divine. God has no say as to what something ought to be to count as divine. God must measure up to a set of requirements he in no way determines. Something beyond him tells him what he ought to be. Theists will baulk at this, and rejoin: surely what God is determines what it is to be divine. There is no independent standard of deity; all the concept of deity can do is reflect the nature of the one real God there ever could be. This claim makes sense. Aristotelian theories of attributes embody something like it: compare ‘what dogs *are* determine what it is to be a dog’.

In ST (but for obvious reasons not in LT), this cannot be the end of the story, though. For one then must ask *which* divine being(s) set the content of the concept of deity. And if the Father is causally prior to the other Persons, and is fully divine causally before they exist, there can be only one answer. The Father sets the concept's content. The Father's nature sets what it is to be divine. And the Father then shares his nature with the other Persons. If the Father determines **(p.86)** what it is to be divine, and then passes this nature along to the Son and Spirit, it seems that they share in what is first and foremost *the Father*'s nature: the Father determines the other Persons’ very natures. They do not in turn determine his. The Father is prior and the Son and Spirit posterior to the concept of deity. This seems again to make the Father more divine than the other two—*a fortiori* because it makes him more ultimate than they.

One could avoid this consequence only by holding that the Father does not determine what it is to be divine, and so all Persons equally do not determine this, or that all Persons equally determine this. The first (I have argued) is unacceptable. The second is true only if (counter to orthodoxy) the other Persons do not in fact proceed from the Father. So the best an orthodox ST can do is accept this further respect of inequality among the Persons.

If ST holds that what explains the universe's existing is the Trinity as a whole, still its Trinity is a composite, a whole consisting of three divine parts. As Aquinas reminds us, for any composite, one can ask what puts its parts together, and how.[117] In ST, there is a clear answer for this: the Father is the other parts’ source, and determines their natures and modes of interaction. If so, the Father determines the real nature and direction of the Trinity's causation *ad extra*: he is the world's most ultimate source, and so its source in a way the Trinity as a whole is not. He is wholly so if the Son and Spirit act only as he directs. If they do not, and do act independently of the Father—as on Swinburne's suggestion that the Father graciously leaves them some scope for independent operation

within his overall direction[118]—the Trinity seems ever more like a family of well-behaved Olympians. In either case, it is fair to call the Father the ‘God before God’, using ‘God’ the first time in the sense proper to the Father (Plantinga) and the second in the sense proper to the Trinity. If the Father pre-existed the Trinity (causally if not temporally), determined its nature and composition and set the conditions under which its components relate to each other, he seems in some ways superior to the Trinity. But how can anything be in any way superior to the sum of all divine beings?

In any event, there is no question that ST's Father is greater and has more of what makes for divinity than the other Persons. Now I know of no obvious truth which *entails* that what has more of what makes for divinity (or *enough* more of it) is more divine. Perhaps deity is a ‘pass/fail’ attribute—perhaps higher passing grades on the qualifying exam do not translate into a higher grade *simpliciter*, i.e. perhaps whoever has certain properties is fully divine, but some full divinities exceed the minimum requisites. But still, it seems to me very intuitive that ST's Father is so much greater than the Son and Spirit that he is more divine than they: a point Plantinga verges on conceding when he notes that there is a sense of ‘God’, **(p.87)** tied to being the ‘ultimate font’ of ‘divinity’ and so of all else, in which the Father alone is God.[119] Further, the inequalities between Persons which I have pointed out are large enough to be themselves further reasons to say that ST's Persons are divine in different ways, i.e. have non-identical divine natures. If they are, they are further reason to say that ST is Arian in even Plantinga's sense—and so polytheist.[120]

There is no inequality problem for LT. In LT, all deifying attributes primarily belong to God, the sole substance of the Trinity. God is equally the ‘substrate’ of all Persons he constitutes or all events of his cognitive and affective life. So his deifying attributes exist equally in all three Persons.

## A Glance at Unorthodoxy

Of course, ST can avoid the problems of created Gods, and perhaps that of inequality, by denying that the Father begets the Son, claiming perhaps with Brown that this is an illicit transfer to the Godhead of the relation between the Father and Christ's human nature.[121] But to do so would flout orthodoxy. It would also raise difficult questions. One would then wonder, for instance, why there are no less or more than three Gods.[122] Again, if no divine being derives from any other, one wonders why all have just the same nature, or at least

natures so congruent as to assure their cooperation. Is it really credible that there be three deities of precisely the same nature with no causal connection among them? We would not find it credible to say that in the course of evolution, by cosmic coincidence, there appeared at once three animals with the precise genetic make-up of lions and no common ancestry. Most basically, if no divine being derives from any other, if all are equally uncreated and ultimate, then even if their actions always coordinate (due perhaps to their all being omnipotent and so cancelling out one another's tendencies to discordant volitions), one wonders whether we have not finally passed over to full tritheism. In any event, I do not think unorthodoxy acceptable if LT is remotely viable. Historic Christian orthodoxy represents the best effort of nearly 2,000 years of Christian minds to plumb God's nature. It is possible that they have all been wrong, even fundamentally wrong. But it would be hubris for a twentieth-century trinitarian to conclude this so long as any orthodox approach is not utterly exhausted.[123] So if ST's **(p.88)** prospects do not look good, the moral one ought to draw is that it is time to reconsider LT.

## Taking Stock

I have suggested that one basic problem for ST is showing that it is a form of monotheism, and I have examined three broad ways ST's friends have tried to show this. ‘Trinity’ and ‘group mind’ monotheist moves try to treat the sum of the Persons as the ‘one God’ of the Creed. I have argued that these moves denigrate the Persons or are unorthodox even on ST's reading of the Creed.[124] ST's third strategy is functional monotheism. I have raised a variety of problems for this; my overall claim has been that merely functional monotheism is not enough for Christian purposes. So if my arguments are sound, it is not clear that ST can be orthodox or truly monotheist.

## Notes:

(1) *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 864f.

(2) Quoted in Cornelius Plantinga, ‘Social Trinity and Tritheism’, in Cornelius Plantinga and Ronald Feenstra (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 21.

(3) *ST* (Ottawa: Studii Generalis, 1941), Ia.39.5 ad 2, 245a. This and all Latin translations mine. See alsoEdmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 103.

(4) For Aquinas, talk of tropes is not strictly appropriate here, since in fact God is identical with the divine nature (so e.g. Aquinas, ST Ia.3.3). For the nonce this need not concern us.

(5) So e.g. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 181.

(6) Plantinga, 'Social Trinity', 27, 31.

(7) David Brown, 'Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality', in Plantinga and Feenstra (eds.), *Trinity,* 68.

(8) C. Stephen Layman, 'Tritheism and the Trinity', *Faith and Philosophy*, 5 (1988), 295. If we think of the relationship as an ongoing process, we get Jenson's version of ST: 'God is an event…. What the event of God happens to is, first, the triune persons.…God is what happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit' (Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 221).

(9) Brown, 'Trinitarian Personhood', 72–3.

(10) C. J. F. Williams, 'Neither Confounding the Persons nor Dividing the Substance', in Alan Padgett (ed.), *Reason and the Christian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 240.

(11) Thus, if STstates the doctrine correctly, one has to wonder what all the fuss has been historically: if ST is true, most who have found the Trinity puzzling have just been confused or misled, and the claim that the doctrine is a mystery is misplaced (for the last point, see William Alston, 'Swinburne and Christian Theology', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 41 (1997), 56.).

(12) Williams, 'Confounding', 238.

(13) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 177–8.

(14) 'A God' sits ill with intuitions that 'God' is a personal name, or the title for an office which can have but one occupant.

(15) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 172–5; Timothy Bartel, 'Could There Be More Than One Almighty?',*Religious Studies*, 29 (1993), 465–95.

(16) Williams, 'Confounding', 235. If this is so, the Creed's 'they are not three Gods' is nonsense on stilts.

(17) Ibid. 236. In this, says Williams, ‘God’ is unlike ‘god’; Williams sees no conceptual problem in counting gods (236 n. 9).

(18) Ibid. 236.

(19) Ibid.

(20) Ibid. 237.

(21) Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), ch. 1.

(22) As Swinburne once did, writing about the Trinity that ‘the first God solemnly vows to the second God in creating him that…’ (‘Could There Be More Than One God?’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 5 (1988), 232). (*The Christian* God avoids such locutions.)

(23) Some Latin Trinitarians deny this—e.g. Aquinas, ST Ia.11.3 ad 2. But they do so only because they think God immaterial, and as Aristotelians hold that there are quantities or numbers only of material things (Ibid.): whence they infer that there is no such thing as how many Gods there are, and that in a technical sense, monotheism is not a matter of number. But they would endorse ‘all divine beings are identical’, denying that this is just another way to make a number statement.

(24) Plantinga, ‘Social Trinity’, 31.

(25) Ibid.

(26) Ibid.

(27) Ibid. 34. Thus, while LT takes ‘there is one divine substance’ as a claim about (in Aristotle's sense) the divine *first* substance, ST takes it as one about (in Aristotle's sense) the divine *secondary* substance. For more on this distinction, see [William P. Alston, ‘Substance and the Trinity,’ in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 193–201].

(28) Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Nisbet, 1943), 98, 101.

(29) David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London/La Salle, Ill.: Duckworth/Open Court, 1985), 300–1; Layman, ‘Tritheism’; Keith Yandell, ‘Trinity and

Consistency', *Religious Studies*, 30 (1994), 205–6, 216. Yandell calls the Trinity 'an ultimate composite necessarily internally connected individual composed only of essential parts' (205). But his definitions of these terms create problems. According to Yandell, an ultimate individual cannot depend on anything other than itself for existence (205). But every composite depends for its existence on its proper parts, and no composite is identical with any of its proper parts. So it is not clear that the Trinity, as vs. the Persons, really can be an ultimate individual in Yandell's account.

(30) Layman, 'Tritheism', 296–7. Yandell mentions the same thought at 'Trinity and Consistency', 210.

(31) Layman, 'Tritheism', 296.

(32) Save in the attenuated sense that Son and Spirit are necessary, not contingent products of the Father, and we often reserve the term 'created' for God's contingent products.

(33) So Swinburne: 'That there is an omnipotent God is a simpler hypothesis than that there is a God who has such-and-such limited power.…A finite limitation cries out for an explanation of why there is just that particular limit, in a way that limitless does not' (Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 1st edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 95).

(34) And in the Layman–Yandell speculation, could even be surpassed by another actual Person.

(35) Brown, *Trinity*, 300–1.

(36) Ibid.

(37) Ibid. 301.

(38) Plantinga, 'Social Trinity', 43. Peter Van Inwagen also notes this ('Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person', in Padgett (ed.), *Reason*, 212) but his doing so does not (as far as I can see) commit him to ST.

(39) For discussion, see e.g. Ernest Sosa, 'Consciousness of the Self and of the Present', in James Tomberlin (ed.), *Agent, Language and the Structure of the World* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), 131–45; and John Perry, *The Problem of the Essential Indexical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

(40) One need not also say ‘*would* not know on his own’, save for the truths which entail the existence of other Persons. This claim, in other words, leaves one able to say: each is fully divine, and so if each were on his own (*per impossibile*), each would still be omniscient—but wholly through himself, not partly through the others.

(41) If P were a truth about the Father and the Son learned it just by perceiving something about the Father and without accessing His mental states, P would be a truth the Son acquired on his own.

(42) John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 111–12.

(43) Brown, ‘Trinitarian Personhood’, 72–3.

(44) Brown, *Trinity*, 301.

(45) Ibid. 300.

(46) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 175.

(47) Ibid. 129.

(48) Ibid. 172–5.

(49) Louis Werner, ‘Some Omnipotent Beings’, in Linwood Urban and Douglas Walton (eds.), *The Power of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 94–106.

(50) This parallels Swinburne's distinction between God's compatibilist and absolute power, *Christian God*, 136.

(51) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 171–4.

(52) A more precise statement of this ‘inability’: while there may be possible worlds in which the Son tries to bring about P, there are none in which the Father wills that ¬P and the Son tries this. Note that if the Father only contingently wills that ¬P, that the Son cannot then use his power to bring about P does not deprive the Son of that power. It remains possible that the Son bring about P. He could do so if the Father permitted. It is another question, of course, whether Father or Son possibly uses his power to keep the other from trying certain acts.

(53) In the standard treatments of counterfactual conditionals, such conditionals

are trivially true if their antecedents are necessarily false. See e.g. David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 24–6; Robert Stalnaker, ‘ATheory of Conditionals’, in Nicholas Rescher (ed.), *Studies in Logical Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 103–4.

(54) The rest of what makes it true is that power's environment, the relevant part of which is in this case the Father's having willed that ¬P. But this is nothing unusual. Powers’ ranges are always partly set by their environments. If I tried to leap to the top of Everest in one bound, Iwould fail. This is true due to a limit on my powers. The environment in which I find myself (e.g. the Earth's gravity) is part of the reason my powers are thus limited.

(55) In this line of reasoning, the Persons are at most omnipotent only dispositionally: they would be so if there were no other divine Persons. But it is hard to say even this about them. For orthodoxy, God is necessarily tripersonal – it is not possible that God exist without being triune. If so, then each Person necessarily co-exists with other Persons. But then each Person would be omnipotent only in an impossible circumstance: their ‘disposition to be omnipotent’ is one which it is impossible that they exercise. Very plausibly there cannot be such a property. If this is so, then if deity requires being omnipotent, only the Trinity as a whole is divine: the Persons are not.

(56) Furthermore, the Layman–Yandell speculation about limited Persons leaves it open that the three Persons each have a different nature.

(57) This winds up so even in Swinburne's version of ST, though he generally parses traits of the Trinity into those of the Persons (as we see below). For Swinburne, each Person exists with ‘metaphysical necessity’ (*Christian God*, 147–8), but the Trinity as a whole has ‘ontological necessity’ (Ibid. 120–1, 181). What has ontological necessity depends for its existence on nothing which is not part of itself (Ibid. 119–20, 181). Each Person, in Swinburne's account, depends for existence on substances which are not part of Himself (Ibid. 147–8). Intuitively, ontological necessity is the more impressive property, and the one more appropriate to deity. In fact, it is not clear that Swinburne's version of divine necessity really accords with any of the intuitions which lie behind doctrines of divine necessity. These have their roots in the ideas that God is a perfect being and that it is a defect to be insecure in existence, to be such that one's existence depends on factors outside oneself. But on Swinburne's account, at every moment, each Person exists just as each creature exists—only due to some deity's refraining from annihilating him. Classically, doctrines of divine

necessity are ways to express the difference between God and creatures (see e.g. David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986)?). Swinburne's version of ST keeps his doctrine of divine necessity from doing this.

(58) So e.g. John Champion, *Personality and the Trinity* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1935), 66–7, and Charles Bartlett, *The Triune God* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937), 81. Hodgson's likening of the Persons' unity to that of a single self (*Doctrine*, 85–96) suggests this as well.

(59) I take the thought-experiment which follows from Peter Unger, *Identity, Consciousness and Value*(New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 6. Unger in turn credits Arnold Zuboff with the basic ideas.

(60) On this, see D. H. M. Brooks, *The Unity of the Mind* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), 20–5, 64–7, 143–55.

(61) Thomas Nagel, 'Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness', in John Perry (ed.), *Personal Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 231–2.

(62) See e.g. K. V. Wilkes, Real People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Brooks, *Unity*.

(63) I do not know whether they can do so afterward.

(64) I owe this phrasing to the counsel of Trent Merricks.

(65) Williams, 'Confounding'.

(66) Ibid. 242.

(67) I am not sure this is the right way to read Williams; 'the same will' suggests the one-mind option. But taking Williams this way at least gets one more idea on the table.

(68) I am indebted for this point to a similar one by Bartel (T. W. Bartel, 'Could There Be More Than One Lord?,' *Faith and Philosophy*, 11 (1994), 367–8).

(69) For the difference between such indexical self-knowledge and anything which can be expressed in such third-person forms as 'the Son shall…', see John Perry, 'The Problem of the Essential Indexical', in Perry, *Essential Indexical*, 33–50.

(70) ‘Intentionally’ and ‘by nature’ are compatible, because not everything one intends to do is something one chooses to do. See e.g. ST 1a.41.2 ad 3.

(71) One might ask: couldn’t it be that first the Father alone has this intention, and it comes to belong to the Son only once he exists? This requires us to say that one and the same mental state first has one subject, and then has two. I am not sure this makes sense.

(72) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 181.

(73) Ibid. 181. But again, the Persons would be ‘totally mutually dependent and necessarily jointly behind each other's acts’ even if they hated each other and were constantly at odds. If such Persons had the power to destroy each other, they would depend on one another's forbearance even to continue in being. If they did not, then still, for reasons already sketched, any one could achieve what He purposed only to the extent that the others permitted, and so any act one did would necessarily have the others ‘behind it’ as well.

(74) A sum of conscious beings is not a conscious being *just because* it is a sum of conscious beings: the sum of all humans is not conscious. If a group mind is both a sum of minds and itself a conscious mind, it is conscious not because it is a sum but because of other relations between the minds it combines.

(75) So *Christian God*, 181; see also Hodgson, *Doctrine*, 94, 105.

(76) Plantinga, ‘Social Trinity’, 36.

(77) Ibid. 28–9. For Western Christendom, Son and Father jointly ‘breathe’ the Spirit. For the East, this is false, but the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.

(78) Again, this is the doctrine of *perichoresis*. For discussion and references to Gregory of Nyssa, see [Sarah Coakley, ‘“Persons” and the “Social” Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion,’ in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 123–44].

(79) Swinburne, *Christian* God, 171–5.

(80) Ibid. 174. In versions of ST which more deeply stress *perichoresis*, e.g. Williams's or perhaps Gregory of Nyssa's, talk of cooperation is out of place, and

this point would not apply.

(81) Aquinas called ‘God’ a *nomen naturae*, a name for an individual which signifies a kind-nature in the item to which it applies (ST Ia.13.9 ad 2). Perhaps ‘God’ in ‘the Father is God’ is such a term. But in ST, this cannot be how ‘God’ functions in ‘the Trinity is God’. For ST's Trinity is not a fourth case of the divine nature alongside the Persons.

(82) Particularly given Pike's attractive thesis that ‘God’ has the logic of a ‘title term’ (Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), ch. 1). ST clashes with the linguistic evidence which favors Pike's thesis, for one can use a title-term to address the holder of an office whose title the term gives (‘Caesar, we beseech you’). For discussion of the logic of ‘God’, see Michael Durrant, *The Logical Status of ‘God’* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

(83) One can also ask this of Yandell, who suggests taking ‘the Father is God’ (etc.) as ‘the Father is part of God’, etc. (‘Trinity and Consistency’, 211).

(84) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 180.

(85) Again, orthodoxy also assigns the Son some role in the Spirit's existing.

(86) True, most writers follow Stalnaker and Lewis in calling all such conditionals true. But few if any are sure that they are *right* to do so. Lewis himself, for one, is quite diffident on this (see Lewis,*Counterfactuals*, 25–6). Furthermore, it is not hard to see why such conditionals involving God might be an exception to this rule; see e.g. my ‘God and Abstract Entities’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 7 (1990), 193–217. Finally, even if we accepted that all such conditionals are true, still some might have their truth overdetermined, with both a general semantic theory and some specific theological truths as sufficient grounds for truth—and this could itself constitute a significant difference between some of them.

(87) So e.g. Layman, ‘Tritheism’, 294, and Thomas Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 214.

(88) Yandell, ‘Trinity and Consistency’, 216.

(89) Jesus specifically endorses the *shema* at Mark 12: 29. See also 1 Cor. 8: 6.

(90) Clark notes that this should also affect how we read the Church's intent in its early Creeds (Kelly Clark, ‘Trinity or Tritheism?’, *Religious Studies*, 32

(1996), 473).

(91) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 174.

(92) Clark speculates that discrete, equally-omniscient, and perfectly good deities might each just freely will, in accord with a commonly held moral theory, to do a good-optimizing act complementary to whatever acts the other chose (Clark, 'Tritheism?', 469). But there is no guarantee that Persons will in fact adopt the same moral theory (though their likeness of mind makes this very likely). More importantly, if they are all on an equal footing, and none has more right to 'go first' than any of the others, and all are equally good (and so respectful of one another's rights and prerogatives), why would any single Person 'go first' and make the others conform their actions to his initiatives? (Swinburne's answer, that the Father has the moral right to do so because he is the others' ultimate source, creates problems of inequality—of which more anon.) Further, whether or not some Person would 'go first', there is no guarantee that one Person's range of complementary acts will not wind up more restricted than some other's does.

(93) This seems to be Swinburne's choice, assuming that the divine being who initiates an act has somewhat more responsibility for it than the divine beings who merely support it; see *Christian God*, 174, 178.

(94) If, say, one Person could not act unless the others let Him.

(95) Some theists (e.g. Leibniz) say that God exists because it is his nature to do so. It is not clear, though, that this does or means to trace God's existence back to some more basic fact.

(96) See e.g. William Wainwright, 'Monotheism', in Robert Audi and William Wainwright (eds.),*Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 289–314.

(97) Thus, ST is in Swinburne's sense relevantly more complex than non-Social Trinitarianism—and so Swinburne ought to grant that LT explains those facts about the world which call for theistic explanation better than ST. If a non-Social view is relevantly simpler than ST, and (as Swinburne argues) the simpler theory is *a priori* more probable, Swinburnean natural theology confirms some non-Social view more than ST.

(98) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 177–8.

(99) Ibid. 179.

(100) Ibid.

(101) Swinburne is right that the qualitative difference between cooperating with one and cooperating with two is not as great as that between sharing and cooperating in sharing. But one cannot help thinking that with the absent pre-given theological conviction that there are in fact just three Persons, the difference to which Swinburne points is not a satisfying answer to ‘why just three?’ (as vs. ‘why at least three?’).

(102) All that follows could be also said of the Father (and in Western trinitarianism the Son) in relation to the Spirit.

(103) So Swinburne: ‘he divides himself…he creates as a separate God what but for his creative action would be himself’ (‘Could There Be?,’ 232). In *The Christian God*, Swinburne drops this claim.

(104) Swinburne, ‘Could There Be?’, 233.

(105) Ibid. 232. Swinburne goes on to deny that this is creation *ex nihilo*, because the second God does not exist contingently, and that this ‘creation’ amounts to a self-division by the first God: ‘he divides himself’ (Ibid.). In *The Christian God*, Swinburne carefully avoids calling the Father's begetting the Son a case of creating, to stress the distinction between the Father's producing what we ordinarily call creatures, contingently, and his producing the Son and Spirit, necessarily. But if the Son and Spirit are discrete substances, and their appearings are in no sense the Father's ‘dividing Himself’, they do not literally come from ‘the stuff of’ the Father. So they can only be appearing *ex nihilo*, i.e. not from any stuff, even if they appear necessarily.

(106) So Burrell, *Knowing*. By contrast, the Father is unique either in having no source for his nature, or perhaps being somehow the source of his own nature.

(107) Not, of course, in all. For instance, nothing in STrequires one to say that ‘there was a time when the Son was not’ (see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. edn. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 228).

(108) Orthodox Chalcedonian christology avoids this. Jesus Christ consists exhaustively of the second Person of the Trinity, a human body and a human soul (or mind). None of these is both created and divine. Thus, Christ is both human and divine without there being a created God.

(109) Thus, the drive, across a millennium of Christian Platonism, to construe the Forms either as not distinct from God or as created.

(110) *The Christian God*, 190.

(111) Ibid. 180, my emphasis. Swinburne writes that 'it surely must be that if there are two divine individuals, one is the ultimate source of being…arguments to the existence of God derive their force from their ability to explain the orderly complexity of our world as deriving from a single source of being. To suppose that there were two or more ultimate sources of being, neither of which was dependent on the other, would be to make a suggestion contrary to what is indicated by arguments for the existence of a God' (173). In this passage, is it the Trinity (though not under that description) to which natural theology concludes, or only the Father?

(112) Swinburne, *Christian God*, 191.

(113) Such texts as John 1: 3 and Rom. 11: 36 suggest that creation is from the Father through the Son. But this does not deny that the Son exercises causality. It merely suggests how Father's and Son's causality are related.

(114) For the contrary claim that all such conditionals are vacuously true, see Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, 24–6, and Stalnaker, 'Theory', 103, 104.

(115) Swinburne allows for the possibility that another Person, once existing, might not be sustained by the Father, but go on 'under its own steam' (*Christian God*, 119) and claims that once the others exist, the Father also in a way depends on them, since he depends for his continued existence on their not annihilating him (Ibid. 173). Even if we grant Swinburne all this, there still remains a real, important asymmetry between the Persons. The Father was at some time the active cause of the others. The others were never at any time active causes of the Father (see esp. Ibid. 177, 185 and for a careful treatment of all this, Alston, 'Swinburne and Christian Theology', 35–57). So even if we grant Swinburne all his claims, the Father remains roughly a 'Deist creator' vis-à-vis the others (save that a Deist God does not exist at the good pleasure of the universe)—still a significantly greater position than theirs.

(116) See my 'Is God an Abstract Object?', *Nous*, 24 (1990), 581–98, and 'Concepts of God', *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

(117) *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1. 18. It is because he appreciates this that Williams argues that ST provides a good terminus for natural-theological arguments only if its three Persons have but one act and will among them (Williams, 'Confounding', 230, 242)—for if this is so, then *qua* explainer, the Trinity is not composite.

(118) *The Christian God*, 174–5.

(119) Plantinga, 'Social Trinity', 31.

(120) If some cases of deity are greater than others, then being divine (i.e. being a case of deity) does not entail being the greatest thing there is, let alone the greatest *possible* being, and some Persons have perfections which accrue to them other than by being divine (in which they are all equal) or by their actions (in which all partake equally). Rather, at most, being divine entails belonging to a kind each of whose members must be greater than any non-member. And the title 'greatest possible being' can apply (if at all) only to the Father or to the Trinity as a whole. Thus, ST has implications for perfect being theology.

(121) Brown, *Trinity*, 283. This is Bartel's move, 'More Than One Almighty?,' 472–3.

(122) More orthodox ST can appeal to the Father's action and nature here.

(123) Here I am indebted to some recent remarks by Eleonore Stump.

(124) 'Or' here is not an exclusive disjunction.

# Toward a Tenable Social Trinitarianism

**William Lane Craig**

## Models of the Trinity

Does the doctrine of the Trinity make sense? Enlightenment thinkers denounced the doctrine as an incoherence; but during the twentieth century many theologians came to a reappreciation of Trinitarian theology, and in recent decades a number of Christian philosophers have sought to formulate defensible versions of the doctrine of the Trinity. Two broad models or approaches are typically identified: **Social Trinitarianism**, which lays greater emphasis on the diversity of the persons, and **Latin Trinitarianism**, which places greater stress on the unity of God. This nomenclature is, however, misleading, since the great Latin Church Fathers Tertullian and Hilary were both Social Trinitarians, as was Athanasius, a fount of Latin theology. Therefore, we shall instead contrast Social Trinitarianism with what one wag has called **Anti-Social Trinitarianism**. The central commitment of Social Trinitarianism is that in God there are three distinct centers of self-consciousness, each with its proper intellect and will. The central commitment of Anti-Social Trinitarianism is that there is only one God, whose unicity of intellect and will is not compromised by the diversity of persons. Social Trinitarianism threatens to veer into tri-theism; Anti-Social Trinitarianism is in danger of lapsing into unitarianism.

Social Trinitarians typically look to the Cappadocian Fathers as their champions. As we have seen, they explain the difference between substance and *hypostasis* as the difference between a generic essence, say, *man*, and particular exemplifications of it, in this case, several men like Peter, James, and John. This leads to an obvious question: if Peter, James, and John are three men each having the same nature, then why would not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit similarly be three Gods each exemplifying the divine nature?

In his letter to Ablabius "On 'Not Three Gods'," Gregory of Nyssa struggled to answer this question. He emphasizes the primacy of the universal, which is one and unchangeable in each of the three men. Gregory, like Plato, thinks of the universal as the primary reality. But this answer solves nothing. Even if we think of the universal as the primary reality, still it is undeniable that there are three exemplifications of that reality who, in the case of*man*, are three distinct men, as **(p.90)** is obvious from the fact that one man can cease to exist without the others' ceasing to do so. Similarly, even if the one divine nature is the primary

reality, still it is undeniably exemplified by three *hypostaseis*, who should each be an instance of deity.

In order to block the inference to three Gods, Gregory appears to deny that the divine nature can be multiply exemplified. He identifies the principle of individuation as “bodily appearance, and size, and place, and difference in figure and color”—“That which is not thus circumscribed is not enumerated, and that which is not enumerated cannot be contemplated in multitude.” Therefore, the divine nature “does not admit in its own case the signification of multitude.” But if this is Gregory's argument, not only is it incompatible with there being three Gods, but it precludes there being even one God. The divine nature would be unexemplifiable, since there is no principle to individuate it. If it cannot be enumerated, there cannot even be one. On the other hand, if Gregory's argument intends merely to show that there is just one generic divine nature, not many, then he has simply proved too little: for the universal nature may be one, but multiply exemplifiable. Given that there are three *hypostaseis* in the Godhead, distinguished according to Gregory by the intra-Trinitarian relations, then there should be three Gods. The most pressing task of contemporary Social Trinitarians is to find some more convincing answer to why, on their view, there are not three Gods.

Anti-Social Trinitarians typically look to Latin-speaking theologians like Augustine and Aquinas as their champions. To a considerable extent the appeal to Augustine rests on a misinterpretation which results from taking in isolation his analogies of the Trinity in the human mind, such as the lover, the beloved, and love itself (*On the Trinity* 8.10.14; 9.2.2) or memory, understanding, and will (or love) (10.11.17–18). Augustine explicitly states that the persons of the Trinity are not identified with these features of God's mind; rather they are “an image of the Trinity in man” (14.8.11; 15.8.14).

For a bona fide example of Anti-Social Trinitarianism, we may turn to Thomas Aquinas, who pushes the Augustinian analogy to its apparent limit. Aquinas holds that there is a likeness of the Trinity in the human mind insofar as it understands itself and loves itself (*Summa contra gentiles* 4.26.6). We find in the mind the mind itself, the mind conceived in the intellect, and the mind beloved in the will. The difference between this human likeness and the Trinity is, first, that the human mind's acts of understanding and will are not identical with its being and, second, that the mind as understood and the mind as beloved do not subsist and so are not persons. By contrast, Aquinas’ doctrine of divine simplicity implies that God's acts of understanding and willing are identical with

His being, and he further holds (paradoxically) that God as understood and God as beloved do subsist and therefore count as distinct persons from God the Father. According to Aquinas, since God knows Himself, there is in God the one who knows and the intentional object of that knowledge, which is the one known. The one known exists in the one knowing as His Word. They share the same essence and are, **(p.91)** indeed, identical to it, but they are relationally distinct (4.11.13). Indeed, Aquinas holds that the different divine persons just are the different relations in God, like *paternity* (*being father of*) and *filiation (being son of) (Summa theologiae* 1a.40.2). Despite his commitment to divine simplicity, Aquinas regards these relations as subsisting entities in God (*Summa contra gentiles* 4.14.6, 11). Because the one knowing generates the one known and they share the same essence, they are related as Father to Son. Moreover, God loves Himself, so that God as beloved is relationally distinct from God as loving (4.19.7–12) and is called the Holy Spirit. Since God's knowing and willing are not really distinct, the Son and Holy Spirit would be one person if the only difference between them were that one proceeds by way of God's knowing Himself and the other by way of God's loving Himself. But they are distinct because only the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.

## Assessment of the Models

#### Anti-Social Trinitarianism

Is Thomistic Anti-Social Trinitarianism viable? It seems not. Without begging the question in favor of Social Trinitarianism, it can safely be said that on no reasonable understanding of “person” can a person be equated with a relation. Relations do not cause things, know truths, or love people in the way the Bible says God does. Moreover, to think that the intentional objects of God's knowing Himself and loving Himself constitute in any sense really distinct persons is wholly implausible. Even if God the Father were a person, and not a mere relation, there is no reason, even in Aquinas’ own metaphysical system, why the Father as understood and loved by Himself would be different persons. The distinction involved here is merely that between oneself as subject (“I”) and as object (“me”). There is no more reason to think that the individual designated by “I”, “me”, and “myself” constitute a plurality of persons in God's case than in any human being's case. Anti-Social Trinitarianism seems to reduce to classical Modalism.

Suppose the Anti-Social Trinitarian insists that in God's case, the subsistent relations within God really do constitute distinct persons in a sufficiently robust sense. Then two problems present themselves. First, there arises an infinite

regress of persons in the Godhead. If God as understood really is a distinct person, called the Son, then the Son, like the Father, must also understand Himself and love Himself. There are thereby generated two further persons of the Godhead, who, in turn, can also consider themselves as intentional objects of their knowledge and will, thereby generating further persons, *ad infinitum*. We wind up with a fractal-like infinite series of Trinities within Trinities in the Godhead. Aquinas actually considers this objection, and his answer is that "just as the Word is not another god, so neither is He another intellect; consequently, **(p.92)** not another act of understanding; hence, not another word" (*Summa contra gentiles* 4.13.2). This answer only reinforces the previous impression of Modalism, for the Son's intellect and act of understanding just are the Father's intellect and act of understanding; the Son's understanding Himself is identical with the Father's understanding Himself. The Son seems but a name given to the Father's "me." Second, one person does not exist in another person. On Aquinas' view the Son or Word remains in the Father (4.11.180). While we can make sense of a relation's existing in a person, it seems unintelligible to say that one person exists in another person. (Two persons' inhabiting the same body is obviously not a counter-example.) Classic Trinitarian doctrine affirms that more than one person may exist in one being, but persons are not the sort of entity that exists in another person. It is true that the classic doctrine involves a *perichoreisis (circumcessio*) or mutual indwelling of the three persons in one another which is often enunciated as each person's existing in the others. But this may be understood in terms of complete harmony of will and action, of mutual love, and full knowledge of one another with respect to the persons of the Godhead; beyond that it remains obscure what could be literally meant by one person's being in another person. Again, we seem forced to conclude that the subsisting relations posited by the Anti-Social Trinitarian do not rise to the standard of personhood.

#### Social Trinitarianism

Are there brighter prospects for a viable Social Trinitarianism? Brian Leftow has distinguished three forms of Social Trinitarianism on offer: **Trinity Monotheism, Group Mind Monotheism, and Functional Monotheism**.

To consider these in reverse order, Functional Monotheism appeals to the harmonious, interrelated functioning of the divine persons as the basis for viewing them as one God. For example, Richard Swinburne considers God to be a logically indivisible, collective substance composed of three persons who are also substances. He sees the Father as the everlasting active cause of the Son and

Spirit, and the latter as permissive causes, in turn, of the Father. Because all of them are omnipotent and perfectly good, they cooperate in all their volitions and actions. It is logically impossible that any one person should exist or act independently of the other two. Swinburne considers this understanding sufficient to capture the intention of the Church Councils, whose monotheistic affirmations, he thinks, meant to deny that there were three independent divine beings who could exist and act without one another.

Leftow blasts Swinburne's view as “a refined paganism,” a thinly veiled form of polytheism.[1] Since, on Swinburne's view, each person is a discrete substance, **(p.93)** it is a distinct being, even if that being is causally dependent upon some other being for its existence. Indeed, the causal dependence of the Son on the Father is problematic for the Son's being divine. For on Swinburne's account, the Son exists in the same way that creatures exist—only due to a divine person's conserving Him in being and not annihilating Him. Indeed, given that the Son is a distinct substance from the Father, the Father's begetting the Son amounts to *creatio ex nihilo*, which as Arius saw, makes the Son a creature. If we eliminate from Swinburne's account the causal dependence relation among the divine persons, then we are stuck with the surprising and inexplicable fact that there just happen to exist three divine beings all sharing the same nature, which seems incredible. As for the unity of will among the three divine persons, there is no reason at all to see this as constitutive of a collective substance, for three separate Gods who were each omnipotent and morally perfect would similarly act cooperatively, if Swinburne's argument against the possibility of dissension is correct. Thus, there is no salient difference between Functional Monotheism and polytheism.

Group Mind Monotheism holds that the Trinity is a mind which is composed of the minds of the three persons in the Godhead. If such a model is to be theologically acceptable, the mind of the Trinity cannot be a self-conscious self in addition to the three self-conscious selves who are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for otherwise we have not a Trinity but a Quaternity, so to speak. Therefore, the Trinity cannot itself be construed as an agent, endowed with intellect and will, in addition to the three persons of the Trinity. The three persons would have to be thought of as subminds of the mind of God. In order to motivate such a view, Leftow appeals to thought experiments involving surgical operations in which the cerebral commissures, the network of nerves connecting the two hemispheres of the brain, are severed. Such operations have been performed as a treatment for severe epilepsy, and the results are provocative.

Patients sometimes behave as though the two halves of their brain were operating independently of each other. The interpretation of such results is controversial, but one interpretation, suggested by various thought experiments, is that the patients come to have two minds. Now the question arises whether in a normally functioning human being we do not already have two separable subminds linked to their respective hemispheres which cooperate together in producing a single human consciousness. In such a case the human mind would itself be a group mind.

Applying this notion of a group mind to the Trinity, we must, if we are to remain biblically orthodox, maintain that the minds of the persons of the Trinity are more than mere subminds which either never come to self-consciousness or else share a common mental state as a single self-consciousness. For such a view is incompatible with the persons' existing in an "I–Thou" relationship with one another; on such a view there really is only one person which God is.

In order to be theologically acceptable, Group Mind Monotheism will have to be construed dynamically, as a process in which the subminds emerge into **(p.94)** self-consciousness to replace the single Trinitarian self-consciousness. In other words, what Group Mind Monotheism offers is a strikingly modern version of the old Logos doctrine of the Greek Apologists. The divine Monarchy (the single self-consciousness of the Trinity) contains within itself an immanent Logos (a submind) which at the beginning of the creation of the world is deployed into the divine Economy (the subminds emerge into self-consciousness in replacement of the former single self-consciousness).

This provocative model gives some sense to the otherwise very difficult idea of the Father's begetting the Son in His divine nature. On the other hand, if we think of the primal self-consciousness of the Godhead as the Father, then the model requires that the person of the Father expires in the emergence of the three subminds into self-consciousness (cf. Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians* 4.3). In order to avoid this unwelcome implication, one would need to think of some way in which the Father's personal identity is preserved through the deployment of the divine economy, just as a patient survives a commissurotomy.

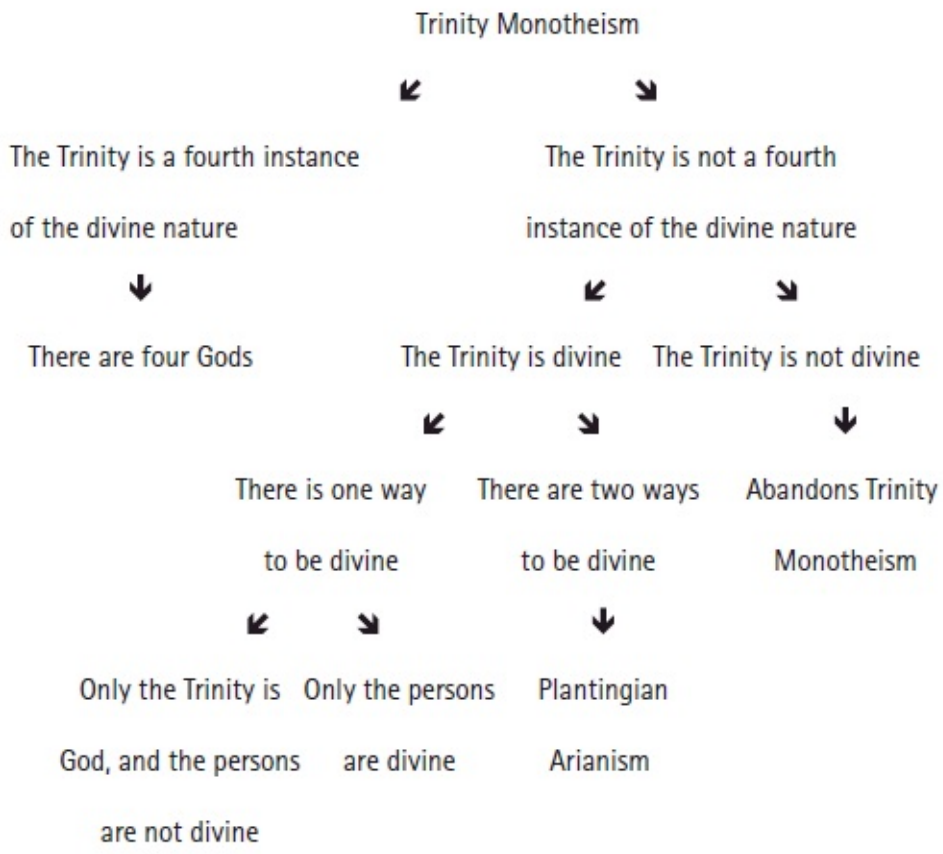
The whole model depends, of course, upon the very controversial notion of subminds and their emergence into distinct persons. If we do not equate minds with persons, then the result of the deployment of the divine economy will be merely one person with three minds, which falls short of the doctrine of the

Trinity. But if, as seems plausible, we understand minds and persons to exist in a one-to-one correspondence, then the emergence of three distinct persons raises once again the specter of tri-theism. The driving force behind Group Mind Monotheism was to preserve the unity of God's being in a way Functional Monotheism could not. But once the divine economy has been deployed, the group mind has lapsed away, and it is unclear why we do not now have three Gods in the place of one.

We turn finally to Trinity Monotheism, which holds that while the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole which is properly God. If this view is to be orthodox, it must hold that the Trinity alone is God and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while divine, are not Gods. Leftow presents the following challenge to this view:

> Either the Trinity is a fourth case of the divine nature, in addition to the Persons, or it is not. If it is, we have too many cases of deity for orthodoxy. If it is not, and yet is divine, there are two ways to be divine—by being a case of deity, and by being a Trinity of such cases. If there is more than one way to be divine, Trinity monotheism becomes Plantingian Arianism. But if there is in fact only one way to be divine, then there are two alternatives. One is that only the Trinity is God, and God is composed of non-divine persons. The other is that the sum of all divine persons is somehow not divine. To accept this last claim would be to give up Trinity monotheism altogether.[2]

**(p.95)** Leftow's dilemma may be graphically exhibited as follows:




How should the Trinity Monotheist respond to this dilemma? Starting with the first disjunction, he will clearly want to say that the Trinity is not a fourth instance of the divine nature, lest there be four divine persons. Moving then to the next set of options, he must say that the Trinity is divine, since that is entailed by Trinity Monotheism. Now if the Trinity is divine but is not a fourth instance of the divine nature, this suggests that there is more than one way to be divine. This alternative is said to lead to Plantingian Arianism. What is that? Leftow defines it as "the positing of more than one way to be divine."[3] This is uninformative, however; what we want to know is why the view is objectionable. Leftow responds, "If we take the Trinity's claim to be God seriously,…we wind up downgrading the Persons' deity and/or [being] unorthodox."[4] The alleged problem is that if only the Trinity exemplifies the complete divine nature, then the way in which the persons are divine is less than fully divine.

This inference would follow, however, only if there were but one way to be divine (namely, by exemplifying the divine nature); but the position asserts that there is more than one way to be divine. The persons of the Trinity are not divine

in virtue of exemplifying the divine nature. For presumably*being triune* is a property of the divine nature (God does not just happen to be triune); yet the persons of the Trinity do not exemplify that property. It now becomes clear that the reason that the Trinity is not a fourth instance of the divine nature is that **(p.96)** there are no other instances of the divine nature. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not instances of the divine nature, and that is why there are not three Gods. The Trinity is the sole instance of the divine nature, and therefore there is but one God. So while the statement “The Trinity is God” is an identity statement, statements about the persons like “The Father is God” are not identity statements. Rather they perform other functions, such as ascribing a title or office to a person (like “Belshazzar is King,” which is not incompatible with there being co-regents) or ascribing a property to a person (a way of saying, “The Father is divine,” as one might say, “Belshazzar is regal”).

So if the persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of being instances of the divine nature, in virtue of what are they divine? Consider an analogy. One way of being feline is to exemplify the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat's DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a sort of downgraded or attenuated felinity: a cat's skeleton is fully and unambiguously feline. Indeed, a cat just is a feline animal, as a cat's skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if a cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, in virtue of what is a cat's DNA or skeleton feline? One plausible answer is that they are parts of a cat. This suggests that we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God. Now obviously, the persons are not parts of God in the sense in which a skeleton is part of a cat; but given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seems undeniable that there is some sort of **part/whole relation** obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.

Far from downgrading the divinity of the persons, such an account can be very illuminating of their contribution to the divine nature. For parts can possess properties which the whole does not, and the whole can have a property because some part has it. Thus, when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent; rather God has these properties because the persons do. Divine attributes like omniscience, omnipotence, and goodness are grounded in the persons’ possessing these properties, while divine attributes like necessity, aseity, and eternity are not so grounded. With respect to the latter, the persons have these properties because God as a whole has them. For parts can have some properties in virtue of the

wholes of which they are parts. The point is that if we think of the divinity of the persons in terms of a part/whole relation to the Trinity that God is, then their deity seems in no way diminished because they are not instances of the divine nature.

Is such a solution unorthodox? It is true that the Church Fathers frequently insisted that the expression “from the substance of the Father” should not be understood to imply that the Son is formed by division or separation of the Father's substance. But the concern here was pretty clearly to avoid imagining the divine substance as a sort of “stuff” which could be parceled out into smaller pieces. Such a stricture is wholly compatible with our suggestion that any one person is not identical to the whole Trinity, for the part/whole relation at issue here does not involve separable parts. It is simply to say that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead. The Latin Church Father Hilary seems to **(p.97)** capture the idea nicely when he asserts, “Each divine person is in the Unity, yet no person is the one God” (*On the Trinity* 7.2; cf. 7.13, 32).

On the other hand, it must be admitted that a number of post-Nicene creeds, probably under the influence of the doctrine of divine simplicity, do include statements which can be construed to identify each person of the Trinity with God as a whole. For example, the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675) affirms, “Each single person is wholly God in Himself,” the so-called Athanasian Creed (eighth century) enjoins Christians “to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord,” and the Fourth Lateran Council, in condemning the idea of a divine Quaternity, declares, “each of the Persons is that reality, *viz*., that divine substance, essence, or nature.…what the Father is, this very same reality is also the Son, this the Holy Spirit.” If these declarations are intended to imply that statements like “The Father is God” are identity statements, then they threaten the doctrine of the Trinity with logical incoherence. For the logic of identity requires that if the Father is identical with God and the Son is identical with God, then the Father is identical with the Son, which the same Councils also deny.

Peter van Inwagen has sought to defend the coherence of such creedal affirmations by appeal to Relative Identity. According to this notion, the identity relation is not absolute but is relative to a sort of thing. For example, we say, “The couch is the same color as the chair” (not “The couch is the chair”) or “The Lord Mayor John is the same person as the schoolboy Johnny” (not “The Lord Mayor is the schoolboy Johnny”). Van Inwagen shows that given certain assumptions, we can coherently affirm not only statements like “The Father is

the same being as the Son," "The Father is not the same person as the Son," but even paradoxical statements like "God is a person," "God is the same person as the Father," "God is the same person as the Son," and "The Son is not the same person as the Father." The fundamental problem with the appeal to Relative Identity, however, is that the very notion of Relative Identity is widely recognized to be spurious. Van Inwagen himself admits that apart from Trinitarian theology, there are no known cases of allegedly relative identities which cannot be analyzed in terms of classical identity. Our example of the couch and the chair is not any kind of identity statement at all, for neither piece of furniture literally is a color; rather they have the identical color as a property. The example of the Lord Mayor is solved by taking seriously the tense of the sentence; we should say, "The Lord Mayor was the schoolboy Johnny." Not only are the alleged cases of relative identity spurious, but there is a powerful theoretical argument against making identity relative. Suppose that two things *x*and *y* could be the same N but not be the same P. In such a case *x* could not fail to be the same P as *x*itself, but *y* could. Therefore, *x* and *y* are discernible and so cannot be the same thing. But then it follows that they cannot be the same *N*, since they cannot be the same anything. Identity must therefore be absolute. Finally, even granted Relative Identity, its application to Trinitarian doctrine involves highly dubious assumptions. For example, it must be presupposed that *x* and *y* can be the identical being without being the identical person. Notice how different this is from saying that *x* and *y*are parts of the same being but are different persons. The latter statement is like **(p.98)** the affirmation that *x* and *y* are parts of the same body but are different hands; the former is like the affirmation that *x*and *y* are the identical body but are different hands. Van Inwagen confesses that he has no answer to the questions of how *x* and *y* can be the same being without being the same person or, more generally, how *x* and *y* can be the same N without being the same P. It seems, then, that the ability to state coherently the Trinitarian claims under discussion using the device of Relative Identity is a hollow victory.

Protestants bring all doctrinal statements, even Conciliar creeds, especially creeds of non-ecumenical Councils, before the bar of Scripture. Nothing in Scripture warrants us in thinking that God is simple and that each person of the Trinity is identical to the whole Trinity. Nothing in Scripture prohibits us from maintaining that the three persons of the Godhead stand in some sort of part/whole relation to the Trinity. Therefore, Trinity Monotheism cannot be condemned as unorthodox in a biblical sense. Trinity Monotheism seems therefore to be thus far vindicated.

All of this still leaves us wondering, however, how three persons could be parts of the same being, rather than be three separate beings. What is the salient difference between three divine persons who are each a being and three divine persons who are together one being?

Perhaps we can get a start at this question by means of an analogy. (There is no reason to think that there must be any analogy to the Trinity among created things, but analogies may prove helpful as a springboard for philosophical reflection and formulation.) In Greco-Roman mythology there is said to stand guarding the gates of Hades a three-headed dog named Cerberus. We may suppose that Cerberus has three brains and therefore three distinct states of consciousness of whatever it is like to be a dog. Therefore, Cerberus, while a sentient being, does not have a unified consciousness. He has three consciousnesses. We could even assign proper names to each of them: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. These centers of consciousness are entirely discrete and might well come into conflict with one another. Still, in order for Cerberus to be biologically viable, not to mention in order to function effectively as a guard dog, there must be a considerable degree of cooperation among Rover, Bowser, and Spike. Despite the diversity of his mental states, Cerberus is clearly one dog. He is a single biological organism exemplifying a canine nature. Rover, Bowser, and Spike may be said to be canine, too, though they are not three dogs, but parts of the one dog Cerberus. If Hercules were attempting to enter Hades, and Spike snarled at him or bit his leg, he might well report, “Cerberus snarled at me” or “Cerberus attacked me.” Although the Church Fathers rejected analogies like Cerberus, once we give up divine simplicity Cerberus does seem to represent what Augustine called an image of the Trinity among creatures.

We can enhance the Cerberus story by investing him with rationality and self-consciousness. In that case Rover, Bowser, and Spike are plausibly personal agents and Cerberus a tri-personal being. Now if we were asked what makes Cerberus a single being despite his multiple minds, we should doubtless reply that it is because he has a single physical body. But suppose Cerberus were to be killed, **(p.99)** and his minds survive the death of his body. In what sense would they still be one being? How would they differ intrinsically from three exactly similar minds which have always been unembodied? Since the divine persons are, prior to the Incarnation, three unembodied Minds, in virtue of what are they one being rather than three individual beings?

The question of what makes several parts constitute a single object rather than distinct objects is a difficult one. But in this case perhaps we can get some

insight by reflecting on the nature of the soul. We have argued that souls are immaterial substances and have seen that it is plausible that animals have souls (see Chapter 11 [of Philosophical Foundations, not reproduced here]). Souls come in a spectrum of varying capacities and faculties. Higher animals such as chimpanzees and dolphins possess souls more richly endowed with powers than those of iguanas and turtles. What makes the human soul a person is that the human soul is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination. Now God is very much like an unembodied soul; indeed, as a mental substance God just seems to be a soul. We naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons. But the reason human souls are individual persons is because each soul is equipped with one set of rational faculties sufficient for being a person. Suppose, then, that God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality, and volition, as Social Trinitarians maintain. God would clearly not be three discrete souls because the cognitive faculties in question are all faculties belonging to just one soul, one immaterial substance. God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings each support one person. Such a model of Trinity Monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula “three persons in one substance.”

Notes:

(1) Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) [=Chapter 4 of this volume], p. 232.

(2) Ibid., p. 221.

(3) Ibid., p.208.

(4) Ibid.

# Trinity Monotheism

**Daniel Howard-Snyder**

## 1 Trinity Monotheism and the Challenge of Polytheism

According to the Athanasian Creed, “the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God,” that is, “each Person by himself is God”; nevertheless, “they are not three Gods, but one God.” These words imply that the Father is *not a different* God from the Son, and if not a different God, then the*same* God. The Athanasian Creed also affirms that “there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.” These words imply that the Father is a *different* Person from the Son, and if a different Person, then *not the same* Person. I take it that the Athanasian Creed here expresses two claims that are partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity.

*The Sameness Claim*: the Father is the same God as the Son.

*The Difference Claim*: the Father is not the same Person as the Son.

These two claims arguably contradict each other. If we suppose that the relation of Sameness that is affirmed in the Sameness Claim is absolute identity, then the Sameness Claim is an abbreviation of the following conjunction: The Father has the property of being a God, the Son has the property of being a God, and

*The Person Identity Claim*: the Father is absolutely identical with the Son.

In like fashion, if we suppose that the relation of sameness that is denied in the Difference Claim is absolute identity (and if we suppose that the Father is a Person and that the Son is a Person, two other claims partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity), then the Difference Claim is an abbreviation of the following conjunction: The Father has the property of being a Person, the Son has the property of being a Person, and the denial of the Person Identity Claim, namely, the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son. Thus, given our suppositions, the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim cannot both be true; their conjunction entails a contradiction.

How might the Trinitarian respond? One option is to deny that the relation of sameness that is affirmed in the Sameness Claim and that is denied in the Difference **(p.101)** Claim is absolute identity.[1] Another option is to insist that, properly understood, the conjunction of the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim does not lead to contradiction, even if the relation of sameness expressed in both claims is absolute identity. This is the route taken by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig.[2]

According to Moreland and Craig, if the Sameness Claim is to be read in a coherent fashion, it must be interpreted as a way of ascribing the same property

or office of divinity to each of the Father and the Son.[3] In that case, the Sameness Claim should be interpreted as a conjunction of the following three claims: (1) the Father is divine, (2) the Son is divine, and (3)

> *The Property Identity Claim*: the property of divinity that the Father instantiates is absolutely identical with the property of divinity that the Son instantiates.

The Father and the Son share in common the very same property in virtue of which each of them is divine; it is false that the Father exemplifies one property of divinity and the Son exemplifies another property of divinity. There exists exactly one property of divinity that each of the Persons exemplifies. In contrast with the Sameness Claim understood as implying the Person Identity Claim, the Sameness Claim understood as implying the Property Identity Claim does not imply that the Father is absolutely identical with the Son. Interpreting the Sameness Claim in this way avoids the contradiction argued for above.

Unfortunately, reading the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim arguably contradicts another claim that is partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity, namely

> *Monotheism*: there exists exactly one God.

Here is why. First, the Difference Claim entails that the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son. Second, the Sameness Claim, understood as implying the Property Identity Claim, entails both that the Father has the property of being divine and that the Son has the property of being divine. But, third, necessarily, for any *x* and y, if *x* is not absolutely identical with *y* but *x* has the property of **(p.102)** being divine and *y* has the property of being divine, then *x* is a God and *y* is a God and *x* is not the same God as y. It follows that the Father is a God and the Son is a God, and the Father is not the same God as the Son. Fourthly, necessarily, for any *x* and y, if *x* is a God and *y* is a God and *x* is not the same God as y, then there are two Gods. Thus, if we read the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim, then, given the Difference Claim, it is false that there exists exactly one God—which contradicts Monotheism. Let us call the argument of this paragraph the “Challenge of Polytheism.”

## 2 Trinity Monotheism Displayed

Moreland's and Craig's response to the Challenge of Polytheism displays three tenets central to their version of Social Trinitarianism, what they call *Trinity*

*Monotheism*.[4] To gain a clearer view of these tenets and to highlight their (alleged) utility, I will display in section 2 how they can be used to respond to three worries, beginning with the Challenge of Polytheism.

### 2.1. The Challenge of Polytheism

Moreland and Craig propose to meet the Challenge of Polytheism by denying its third premise, namely the following:

> Necessarily, for any *x* and y, if *x* is not absolutely identical with *y* but *x* has the property of being divine and *y* has the property of being divine, then *x* is a God and *y* is a God and *x* is not the same God as *y*.

According to Moreland and Craig, while the Persons are each divine and absolutely distinct, they are not distinct *Gods*. For on their view, there exists exactly one God, namely the Trinity "as a whole," and no Person is absolutely identical with the Trinity "as a whole." Rather, each Person is a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole." Still, each of the Persons is "fully and unambiguously" divine. It is just that they are not divine in the way in which the Trinity "as a whole" is divine; they are fully divine in another, second way. Consequently, there is a way of being divine which is such that each Person is divine in that way and one's being divine in that way does not imply that one is a God.

Here we see at work all three of the core tenets of Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism:

> *The First Tenet*: the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with God.
>
> *The Second Tenet*: there is more than one way to be fully divine.
>
> **(p.103)** *The Composition Claim*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose the Trinity "as a whole," that is, the Persons are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole."

Of course, whether Moreland and Craig can meet the Challenge of Polytheism by deploying the core tenets of their Trinity Monotheism depends on whether those tenets are possibly true and consistent with orthodoxy, both individually and jointly. One might worry that the Second Tenet is especially dubious. How could one be fully divine without exemplifying the nature of divinity?

Moreland and Craig offer a distinctively Christian answer to this question.[5] They say that according to Christian orthodoxy God is triune; moreover God does not

just happen to be triune. Consequently, the property of *being triune* is an essential property of God, in which case it is a property of the divine nature.[6] But if the property of being triune is a property of the divine nature, then none of the Persons exemplifies the divine nature; for none of them exemplifies the property of being triune. But the Persons *are* fully divine, and hence there must be a second way of being fully divine, a way other than that of exemplifying the divine nature. This second way is the way of being a proper part of something that exemplifies the divine nature, that is, the Trinity "as a whole." To help us see how it could be that the Persons are fully divine simply in virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole," they ask us to consider an analogy.

> One way of being feline is to instantiate the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat's DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a sort of downgraded or attenuated felinity: a cat's skeleton is fully and unambiguously feline. Indeed, a cat is just a feline animal, as a cat's skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if a cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, in virtue of what is a cat's DNA or skeleton feline? One plausible answer is that they are parts of a cat. This suggests that we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God. Now obviously, the persons are not parts of God in the sense in which a skeleton is part of a cat; but given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seem undeniable that there is some sort of part—whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.[7]

The upshot, then, is this. There are not four Gods but just one because the divine nature includes the property of being triune and there exists exactly one item which is such that it exemplifies that property, namely the Trinity "as a whole." Still, each of the three Persons is fully divine since each is a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole." So one way to be divine is to instantiate the divine nature; this is how the Trinity "as a whole" gets to be divine. A second way to be divine is to be a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole"; this is how each of the Persons gets to be divine. The cat analogy is supposed to help us see how this latter claim could be true.

### **(p.104)** 2.2. The Diminished Divinity Problem

One might worry that this response to the Challenge of Polytheism comes at a steep price: the divinity of the Persons has been diminished. For if the Persons do not instantiate the divine nature and they are divine in the way in which a

cat's skeleton is feline, then they are no more God-like than a feline skeleton is cat-like, which is to say they are hardly God-like at all. You might put the point this way: if the sense in which the Persons are “divine” approximates the sense in which a cat's skeleton is “feline,” then the sense in which the Persons are “divine” approximates the sense in which any one of the properties that are constitutive of full divinity is “divine” or the sense in which a divine plan is “divine.” But the property of being, say, worthy of worship, although doubtless divine in this sense, lacks what Christians have had in mind when they affirm the full divinity of each of the Persons; similarly for, say, God's plan to redeem Israel. Neither the property of being worthy of worship nor God's plan to redeem Israel exemplify those properties that Christians have had in mind when they affirm the full divinity of each of the Persons, even though the property of being worthy of worship and God's plan to redeem Israel are both “fully and unambiguously” divine. Apparently, one can be fully divine—in this second sense of “divine”—while lacking the traditional attributes of God. It appears, then, that the Challenge of Polytheism is met at the expense of the “Diminished Divinity Problem,” as I will call it. That is a price no Christian should pay.

Moreland and Craig argue that “[f]ar from downgrading the divinity of the persons, such an account [as theirs] can be very illuminating of their contribution to the divine nature.”

> For parts can possess properties which the whole does not, and the whole can have a property because some part has it. Thus, when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent; rather God has these properties because the persons do. Divine attributes like omniscience, omnipotence, and goodness are grounded in the persons’ possessing these properties, while divine attributes like necessity, aseity, and eternity are not so grounded. With respect to the latter, the persons have these properties because God as a whole has them. For parts can have some properties in virtue of the wholes of which they are parts. The point is that if we think of the divinity of the persons in terms of a part—whole relation to the Trinity that God is, then their deity seems in no way diminished because they are not instances of the divine nature.[8]

So, according to Moreland and Craig, being divine by virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity does not diminish the divinity of the Persons, contrary to the Diminished Divinity Problem. Each of the Persons has those properties traditional theists typically associate with divinity, for example, omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable moral goodness, necessity, aseity, eternity.

## **(p.105)** 2.3. The Composition Question

Moreland and Craig rightly observe that "[a]ll of this leaves us still wondering… how three persons could be parts of the same being, rather than three separate beings. What is the salient difference between three divine persons who are each a being and three divine persons who are together one being?"[9]

This is an excellent question: how exactly is it that the three Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole"? Let us call it the Composition Question.

Moreland and Craig suggest that the answer can be seen by reflecting on an analogy. "In Greco-Roman mythology," they write,

> there is said to stand guarding the gates of Hades a three-headed dog named Cerberus. We may suppose that Cerberus has three brains and therefore three distinct states of consciousness of whatever it is like to be a dog. Therefore, Cerberus, while a sentient being, does not have a unified consciousness. He has three consciousnesses. We could even assign proper names to each of them: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. These centers of consciousness are entirely discrete and might well come into conflict with one another. Still, in order for Cerberus to be biologically viable, not to mention in order to function effectively as a guard dog, there must be a considerable degree of cooperation among Rover, Bowser, and Spike. Despite the diversity of his mental states, Cerberus is clearly one dog. He is a single biological organism exemplifying a canine nature. Rover, Bowser, and Spike may be said to be canine, too, though they are not three dogs, but parts of the one dog Cerberus. If Hercules were attempting to enter Hades, and Spike snarled at him or bit his leg, he might well report, "Cerberus snarled at me" or "Cerberus attacked me."…We can enhance the Cerberus story by investing him with rationality and self-consciousness. In that case, Rover, Bowser, and Spike are plausibly personal agents and Cerberus a tri-personal being. Now if we were asked what makes Cerberus a single being despite his multiple minds, we should doubtless reply that it is because he has a single physical body.[10]

One might initially worry that the Trinity "as a whole" does not have a physical body, and consequently that the analogy fails to illuminate how the Persons can compose the Trinity "as a whole." Alive to this worry, Moreland and Craig write:

> [S]uppose Cerberus were to be killed, and his minds survive the death of his body. In what sense would they still be one being? How would they Differ intrinsically from three exactly similar minds which have always been unembodied? Since the divine persons are, prior to the Incarnation, three unembodied minds, in virtue of what are they one being rather than three individual beings?[11]

To answer this question, Moreland and Craig dispense with the Cerberus analogy and answer it with reference to their view regarding the nature of the soul:

> The question of what makes several parts constitute a single object rather than distinct objects is a difficult one. But in this case perhaps we can get some insight by reflecting on the nature of the soul. We have argued that souls are immaterial substances and have seen that it is plausible that animals have souls (see chap. 11). Souls come in a spectrum of **(p.106)** varying capacities and faculties. Higher animals such as chimpanzees and dolphins possess souls much more richly endowed with powers than those of iguanas and turtles. What makes the human soul a person is that the human soul is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination. Now God is very much like an unembodied soul; indeed, as a mental substance God just seems to be a soul. We naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons. But the reason human souls are individual persons is because each soul is equipped with one set of rational faculties sufficient for being a person. Suppose, then, that God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of consciousness, intentionality, and volition, as Social Trinitarians maintain. God would clearly not be three discrete souls because the cognitive faculties in question are all faculties belonging to just one soul, one immaterial substance. God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings support one person. Such a model of Trinity Monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula “three persons in one substance.”[12]

What should we make of these passages that are directed at the Composition Question, especially the last passage? Several preliminary observations are in order.

First, with respect to the Cerberus analogy, it becomes clear that Moreland and Craig meant to say something like this: Cerberus is a single physical organism, and Rover, Bowser, and Spike compose Cerberus *because* Cerberus, that very physical organism, *supports* Rover, Bowser, and Spike; analogously, God is a single immaterial substance, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose God *because* God, that very immaterial substance, *supports* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, Moreland and Craig identify themselves as proponents of a substance metaphysic whose broad contours they describe as Aristotelian.[13] This metaphysic distinguishes individual (or primary) substances or beings from other sorts of things. According to Moreland and Craig, among the immaterial individual substances are souls, which earlier (in chapter 11 of their book) they identified as "mental substances that have mental properties."[14] Each *soul*—that is, each *mental* substance—is absolutely identical with a particular *immaterial* individual substance. Now, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons are persons, but no Person is absolutely identical with an individual substance. There is no individual substance *x* such that the Father is absolutely identical with *x*, even though there is some person *y* such that the Father is absolutely identical with y. And the same goes for the Son and the Holy Spirit. Apparently, then, a person can fail to be absolutely identical with an individual substance.

**(p.107)** On first reading, this claim is liable to induce an incredulous stare. After all, in the Aristotelian tradition, persons are paradigmatic individual substances. *You*, for example, are an individual substance, as am I. Perhaps Moreland and Craig do not wish to deny that *we* are absolutely identical with individual substances. Indeed, it appears that they do not.[15] It appears that they only wish to deny that the three Persons are absolutely identical with individual substances.[16]

Third, Moreland's and Craig's contention that the Father is absolutely identical with a particular person but not with a particular individual substance is mirrored by another thesis, namely that God is absolutely identical with a particular individual substance but not with a particular person. God has three persons as proper parts, but God, the Trinity "as a whole," is not a person. Strictly speaking, using personal pronouns to refer to God presupposes, on their view, the *false* proposition that God is a person. And here I do not mean by "person" anything distinctively modern or Cartesian or anything else (allegedly) objectionable. I have in mind the concept of whatever is, strictly and literally, the referent of a personal pronoun.[17] Even in that minimalist sense of "person," the suggestion

that the Christian God is not a person is most unusual, to say the least.

Fourth, according to Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism, an individual substance can *be* three persons. God is such a substance, they say. “God, though one soul [that is, one immaterial individual substance], would not *be* one person but three persons” (emphasis added). This is an unfortunate choice of words since they might be mistaken for the claim that God is absolutely identical with the three Persons. This claim is false since the relation of absolute identity is a one—one relation, not one—many; moreover, it is incompatible with the conjunction of the First Tenet and the Composition Claim.[18] I suggest that when Moreland and Craig tell us that “God, though one soul, would not be**(p.108)** one person but three,” they mean that, although the Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with a particular soul, It *has as proper parts* three absolutely distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[19]

Although this is not the place to spell out the details, what has been said so far seems to pose some difficulties for the internal consistency of the More-land—Craig take on the philosophical foundations for a Christian worldview, at least as those foundations are expressed in their book by that title. One difficulty is that it appears that none of the arguments for substance dualism that they offer is valid. After all, the Father has each mental property Moreland and Craig ascribe to me, each one of which, they say, is sufficient for my being a mental substance. But if a person can have each of those properties without being a mental substance, as is the case with the Father, then how does the fact that I have them preclude the possibility that I am a person that is not a mental substance? It looks like my having those mental properties does not guarantee that I am a mental substance, a soul.[20] Another difficulty is that none of the Persons has libertarian freedom since, according to Moreland and Craig, none of the Persons is a genuine substance and “a necessary condition for libertarian freedom is that the agent be a genuine substance in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas.”[21] Of course, it also seems that only persons can have libertarian freedom. If so, then, since God is not a person on their view, God does not have libertarian freedom either. But if neither the Persons nor the Trinity “as a whole” has libertarian freedom, then nothing in the vicinity of the Christian God has libertarian freedom. A third difficulty, which is more central to **(p.109)** Trinitarian concerns, is that their argument for a plurality of persons within the Godhead relies on the premise that “creation is a result of God's free will.”[22] But, again, according to their Trinity Monotheism, God is not a person; thus, God has no free will. Finally, their Trinity Monotheism seems to be incompatible with their theory of the

Incarnation since, according to their Trinity Monotheism, the Son is *not* an individual substance but, on their theory of the Incarnation, the Son is an individual substance. For, they tell us, on their theory of the Incarnation, the Logos, which is absolutely identical with the Son, "completes the individual human nature of Christ by furnishing it with a rational soul, which is the Logos himself."[23] It cannot be the case that a particular rational soul is the Logos himself while the Logos himself *is not* a particular soul at all.

Although I would like to report that Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism is a smashing success, I am afraid that I must instead register several worries. In section 3, I emphasize worries with respect to what they have to say about the Persons; in section 4, I emphasize worries with respect to what they have to say about God.

## 3 Worries About the Persons

As we saw above, according to Moreland and Craig, the Trinity "as a whole" is divine because it exemplifies the divine nature. Each Person of the Trinity is also divine, but not because each exemplifies the divine nature; rather, each Person is divine because each is a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole." To explain how this could be, they offered the cat analogy. A cat is fully feline because it exemplifies the feline nature. The skeleton of a cat is also fully feline but not because it exemplifies the feline nature; rather, the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat. In the present section, I will first express three worries about the cat analogy as an analogy. Then, having granted the analogy for the sake of argument, I will urge that Moreland's and Craig's part—whole explanation of how the Persons could be fully divine fails. Finally, I will argue that the Persons are individual substances, given the conditions that Moreland and Craig themselves lay down.

### 3.1. The Cat Analogy

Moreland and Craig assert that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat. This implies that being a proper part of a cat is sufficient for being feline. This implication is false, however. First, since organs can be transplanted from a member of one species into a member of another species, **(p.110)** something that is not feline can nevertheless be a proper part of a cat. Being a proper part of a cat, therefore, is not sufficient for being feline. Second, since the part—whole relation is transitive, it follows that if being a proper part of a cat is sufficient for being feline, then each of the atoms and molecules of a

cat are feline—which is false.

These two worries are minor, perhaps. Instead of saying that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat, Moreland and Craig can say that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part *that is distinctive of the species*.[24]

My third worry about the cat analogy is major. According to Moreland and Craig, *there are two ways of being feline*. What could be meant by these words? Only one of two things, so far as I can see:

> *The Cat Analogy (1)* There is one and only one property of felinity whereby something can be fully feline, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being a cat and the second way is by being a proper part of a cat.
>
> *The Cat Analogy (2)* Words of the form "*x* is feline" are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully feline: the first property is the property of being a cat and the second property is the property of being a proper part of a cat.

Which of these do Moreland and Craig have in mind? I think the text can be read either way, but the first version seems to me the least likely candidate since it fits least well with their attempt to meet the Challenge of Polytheism and to solve the Diminished Divinity Problem. Let me explain.

The cat analogy is supposed to illuminate how it could be that there are two ways to be (fully) divine, which is the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism. But if version one is the right way to understand the cat analogy, then we must understand the Second Tenet in like fashion:

> *The Second Tenet (1)* There is one and only one property of divinity whereby something can be fully divine, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being the Trinity "as a whole" and the second way is by being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole."

Note that version one of the Second Tenet implies that the three Persons exemplify exactly the same property of divinity that the Trinity "as a whole" exemplifies, that the property by virtue of which each of the Persons is divine is absolutely identical with the property by virtue of which the Trinity "as a whole" is divine, and that there is no other property by virtue of which something can be

divine.

From a Trinitarian point of view, the theological implications of Trinity Monotheism combined with version one of the Second Tenet are odious in the extreme. For Trinitarianism insists that each of the Persons is divine, and Trinity **(p.111)** Monotheism insists that the composite formed by the Persons—the Trinity "as a whole"—is divine. There are (at least) four items, then, that are divine. This much Moreland and Craig affirm. But, given version one of the Second Tenet, the property in virtue of which each of those four things is divine is exactly the same property, and there is no other property by virtue of which the Persons or the Trinity "as a whole" are each divine. So, given version one of the Second Tenet, the rationale Moreland and Craig offered for thinking that there is exactly one God vanishes. True, the Trinity "as a whole" exemplifies the property of being composed of the Persons while no Person exemplifies it. But, given version one of the Second Tenet, the divine nature cannot include that property since there is one and only one complex property whereby a thing can be divine and each of the Persons exemplifies that property but each of them lacks the property of being composed of the Persons. So, given version one of the Second Tenet, there are four items that exemplify the divine nature and hence there are four Gods. If, however, contrary to what I just argued, the divine nature *does* include the property of being composed of the Persons, then none of the Persons is divine since, given version one of the Second Tenet, there is no other nature whereby a thing can be divine. The upshot is that a version of Trinity Monotheism wedded to the first version of the cat analogy either fails to meet the Challenge of Polytheism or fails to solve the Diminished Divinity Problem.

So if Trinity Monotheism is to be guided by the cat analogy, it must be guided by the second version, which, to repeat, is this:

> *The Cat Analogy (2)* Words of the form "*x* is feline" are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully feline: the first property is the property of being a cat and the second property is the property of being a proper part of a cat.

Of course, the property of being a cat is just the nature of a cat, a natural kind essence if you will. That way of being feline is the heartwarmingly mysterious way of being feline we are familiar with. But what is this allegedly second way of being fully feline, this distinct, second property of felinity? Moreland and Craig tell us that it is a property exemplified by something that is a proper part of a cat, something that is a proper part of a thing that exemplifies the first, familiar

property, the property of being a cat.[25] But is there really any such second property of felinity? Let us look into the matter more closely.

**(p.112)** Consider my cat, Socrates. Suppose I assert that

(1) Socrates is feline.

The truth-maker for (1) is the fact that

(TM1) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, and there exists an *x* such that *x*is Socrates, and *x* instantiates C.

Now suppose I assert that

(2) Socrates's skeleton is feline.

If the second version of the cat analogy is true, then the truth-maker for (2) is the fact that

(TM2) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, *and there exists a property C* such that C* is a way of being "fully and unambiguously feline" and C* is not C**, and there exists an *x* such that *x* is Socrates and *x* instantiates C, and there exists a *y* such that *y* is Socrates's skeleton *and* y *instantiates C**, and *y* is a proper part of *x*.

What should we think of this implication of the second version of the cat analogy? I think we should reject it. The reason is this. Suppose I assert that

(3) Socrates's skeleton is a part of a cat.

The truth-maker for (3) is the fact that

(TM3) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, and there exists an *x* such that*x* is Socrates and *x* instantiates C, and there exists a *y* such that *y* is Socrates's skeleton, and *y* is a proper part of *x*.

But the truth-maker for (3) is the truth-maker for (2), as evidenced by the fact that what I intended to convey by (2) would be just as well conveyed by (3), and vice versa.[26] So the truth-maker for (2) is *not*the truth-maker that is implied by the second version of the cat analogy, with its extra ontological commitment to a second property of felinity (as indicated by the italicized portions of [2]). That is, the second version of the cat analogy is false.

Moreland and Craig wanted us to see that the Persons could be divine without exemplifying the divine nature. Toward this end, they asserted that there are two ways to be divine, *fully* divine. To help us see their meaning, they argued that just as the skeleton of a cat is fully feline without being a cat but rather in virtue of being a proper part of a cat, so each of the Persons is fully divine without being a God but rather in virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole." I argued that there are two ways to understand what they said about cats; the first way, when applied to the Persons, leads to theological**(p.113)** unacceptabilities, while the second way is simply false. The cat analogy, therefore, fails to help us see how the Persons could be divine without exemplifying the divine nature.[27]

### 3.2. The Diminished Divinity Problem, Again

Suppose that, contrary to what I have just argued, the cat analogy helps us see how the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism could be true. That is, suppose it helps us see how there could be two ways of being fully divine. Then one of the following claims is true:

> *The Second Tenet (1)* There is one and only one property of divinity whereby something can be fully divine, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being the Trinity "as a whole" and the second way is by being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole."
>
> *The Second Tenet (2)* Words of the form "*x* is divine" are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully divine: the first property is the property of being the Trinity "as a whole" and the second property is the property of being a proper part of the Trinity.

I argued in section 3.1 that version one of the Second Tenet leads to theological unacceptabilities. I have nothing more to say about it. In the remainder of section 3, I will focus on version two.

In order to keep track of things, let us name the first property referred to in version two, that is, the property of divinity which is exemplified by the Trinity "as a whole," *divinity* $_1$, and let us name the second property, that is, the property of divinity which is exemplified by the parts of the Trinity,*divinity* $_2$. I can best get at my worries about version two of the Second Tenet by reminding us that, according to Moreland and Craig, just as the skeleton of a cat is *fully*

feline, so the three Persons are*fully* divine. They are not interested in defending some **(p.114)** watered-down sort of divinity of the Persons, they are interested in defending the real traditional article. As we have seen, however, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons are not fully divine in the traditional way, that is, by exemplifying the divine nature. Rather, according to them, the Persons are fully divine because they are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole." Given version two of the Second Tenet, this explanation of the divinity of the Persons is to be understood explicitly as follows: the reason why the Persons are fully divine is that they are divine$_2$, and the reason they are divine$_2$ is that they are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole." Thus, the reason why the Persons are fully divine is that they are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole."

Now, I take it that one way in which this explanation can fail is if something's being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole" is *logically insufficient* for its being fully divine. A second way it can fail is if it*sheds no light* on how it can be that the Persons are fully divine despite their failure to exemplify the divine nature. With this in mind, consider the following two objections.

First, the part—whole relation is transitive. Thus, if the Father is a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole," then the proper parts of the Father are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole." Here are three proper parts of the Father: the Father's cognitive faculty, the Father's affective faculty, and the Father's conative faculty. Consider any one them, for example the Father's affective faculty. Although it is a proper part of the Father and hence a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole," and although it is no doubt impressive in many respects, *it*—the Father's affective faculty—fails to exemplify the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and unsurpassable moral goodness; moreover, *it*—the Father's affective faculty—is not worthy of worship. These properties, however, or at least some of them, are partially constitutive of what it is to be fully divine. It is false, therefore, that something's being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole" is logically sufficient for its being fully divine.

How might Moreland and Craig respond to this objection? Perhaps they will say that the Father has no proper parts. Their talk of the "rational faculties" of the Persons was never intended to be strictly and literally true; rather, the strict and literal truth of the matter is that the Father has various states, capacities, and powers, and these are not proper parts of the things that have them. One might think that this response fails since, even if the Father has no proper parts, it is nevertheless a consequence of Moreland's and Craig's position that if He did, they would be omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and worship-worthy;

however, this counterpossible proposition is false.[28]

Another response is to agree that being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” is logically insufficient for full divinity but add that being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” *and a person* is logically sufficient. Thus, even if the Father had proper parts, they would not have the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, **(p.115)** unsurpassable goodness, and worship-worthiness (unless they were persons, which they would not be). This leads to what I think is a more telling, second objection.

Imagine what it would be like for someone alien to Trinitarianism to hear for the first time that God is composed of three distinct Persons. Our alien might naturally wonder whether the Persons are fully divine and, if so, how that could be, especially after he is told that the Persons do not exemplify the divine nature. If he were answered that the Persons are, indeed, fully divine, because they are proper parts of God, he would rightly remain puzzled. After all, he might say, something's being a proper part of God would not logically suffice for its being fully divine; would it not have to be a proper part that was *a person* as well? “Well, of course!” we might reply; we were taking it for granted that the Persons are persons. Our alien might still remain puzzled, however. After all, he might say, something is a person just in case it has powers of rationality, volition, and so on that are sufficient for personhood, but something's being a proper part of God that possesses any old powers of rationality, and so forth, is not logically sufficient for its being fully divine. Would it not have to possess the *appropriate* powers of rationality, and so forth, those that are logically sufficient for being fully divine? “Well, of course!” we might reply; we were taking it for granted that the Persons were persons who had the appropriate powers of rationality, and so on.

What should our alien make of this answer? Two things, I suggest. First, he should concede that something's *being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” that possesses powers of rationality, volition, and so forth, that are logically sufficient for full divinity* is, indeed, logically sufficient for its being fully divine. Second, he should be unsatisfied with this answer. He asked not only *whether* the Persons are fully divine but also, if so, *how that could be*, given that they do not exemplify the divine nature. The new explanans sheds no light on that question; moreover, the part of it that has to do with being a proper part is explanatorily idle. It is idle because the appeal to being a proper part of God plays no role at all in the new explanans. What is doing the explaining (if anything at all) is the appeal to each Person possessing the relevant powers. The

new explanans sheds no light because the explanans that was originally given has been expanded so that it merely asserts that the Persons are fully divine.

The upshot is that, along with the cat analogy itself, Moreland's and Craig's more direct part—whole explanation of how the Persons could be fully divine fails. The Diminished Divinity Problem remains on the table; the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism remains shrouded in obscurity, hardly the hallmark of a useful model of the consistency of Trinitarianism.

### 3.3. Are the Persons Individual Substances?

According to Moreland and Craig, although the Persons are persons, they are not individual substances. The mode of being that the Persons enjoy is not as basic or primary or fundamental as the mode of being that God and cats and dogs enjoy.

**(p.116)** One worry about this view of the Persons is best seen by way of a question: if the Persons are not individual substances, then to what category do they belong? Aristotle divided the category of substance into primary or individual substances such as you and me, and secondary substances such as the genus animal and the species humankind. Secondary substances, however, are universals; presumably, Moreland and Craig do not mean to say that each Person is absolutely identical with a universal. So what does that leave us in the way of categories to which the Persons might belong? On the traditional Aristotelian list of the categories, we are left with the nine categories of quantity, quality, a relative, a place, a time, a position, a having, a doing, and a being affected. But none of the Persons is absolutely identical to such “things.” Once you rule out the category of individual substance which is the natural home of persons, the pickings appear to be quite slim. Instead of exploring the options here, I want to focus on the following question: given Moreland's and Craig's own broadly Aristotelian account of what an individual substance is, are the Persons individual substances?

Moreland and Craig introduce their readers to individual substances with these words: “It would seem that properties do, in fact exist and that they are genuine universals. However, reality involves a lot more than properties; there are also individual things like cats and dogs that have properties. Philosophers call such individuals substances…”[29]

To be sure, they note, there have been different conceptions of substance throughout the ages, but, they say, “the most central idea…is one which takes

living organisms—individual human beings, butterflies, dogs, oak trees—as the paradigm cases."[30] And that conception is the one that they denominate "substance," or, more accurately, "individual substance." They go on to list what they regard as several features of "the traditional notion of substance," which they affirm, and which they appear to offer as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being an individual substance.[31]

> (1) An individual substance has properties, but nothing has an individual substance in the sense of having a property.
> (2) The properties and capacities of an individual substance, as well as its proper parts if it has any, form a tight unity. Each individual substance has a nature (essence) by virtue of which it is the kind of thing that it is and without which it would neither exist nor have the basic structure or capacities that it has. If it is a whole composed of parts, its parts are what they are in virtue of playing the role that they play in the whole; apart from the whole, they cease to exist.
> (3) An individual substance remains the same through change.
> (4) An individual substance grows and develops in a law-like fashion in accordance with its nature, and it has in its nature a tendency to realize various potentialities contained therein.
> **(p.117)** (5) An individual substance has something which individuates it from other individual substances that share its nature, something in virtue of which it is a this.

Now, consider the Father. Clearly enough, He has properties, but nothing has Him in the sense of having properties; thus, (1) is satisfied. To be sure, on the view of Moreland and Craig, God *has* the Father in some sense—namely, in the way in which a whole has its proper parts—but it certainly does not follow that God has the property of being the Father. Does the Father have a nature (essence)? Does He belong to a (super)natural kind? Moreland and Craig insist that no Person exemplifies the divine nature since the divine nature includes the property of being triune and no Person has that property, but they also insist that each Person is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, unsurpassably morally good, and the like. I see no recourse here but to say that, on their view, each Person exemplifies the nature of a *divine person*; this nature distinguishes the Persons from God, that is, the Trinity "as a whole," since God, on their view, is not a person at all. Moreover, it is in virtue of exemplifying the nature of a divine person that the Father is the sort of thing that He is and has the fundamental features and capacities that He has; if He did not exemplify this nature, He

would not exist. Finally, being a divine person is a tight unity; all and only divine persons fall into the class of divine persons. Condition (2) is satisfied.

Given the satisfaction of conditions (1) and (2), condition (5) is satisfied. Whatever the details about the "individuating component," the Father is this divine person and not one of *the others*. As for condition (3), the Father remains the same through change in His contingent relations to creatures, for example, their conversion and apostasy. As for contingent nonrelational features: if He has any, then presumably *wanting me to stop cussing so much* and *feeling saddened by my cussing so much* are two that He has these days, properties He lacked before I was ten years old and will lack upon my complete sanctification (I hope).

Condition (4) is the oddball. While organisms, the paradigms of individual substances, may well grow and develop, thereby lawfully realizing their potential as the sorts of things they are, only on views which share too much in common with process theology can we say the same thing of God—which is another way of saying (4) is not a strict necessary condition on being an individual substance. Thus, the Persons meet the conditions for being individual substances just as God does, contrary to the Trinitarian model Moreland and Craig propose.[32]

Why does this matter? Why cannot Moreland and Craig just grant that the Persons are individual substances? Why did they insist otherwise in the first place? So far as I can discern, they insist that the Persons are not individual substances because they want their model to be a clear instance of "the classical formula," namely "three persons in one substance," where "substance" means individual**(p.118)** substance and where the preposition "in" is taken seriously.[33] Perhaps they are thinking that if the Persons are individual substances, then their model posits four individual substances, not just one, as the classical formula requires. If the classical formula does indeed require that there be only one individual substance in the neighborhood (and I am not saying that it does), then, since by their own accounting the Persons are distinct individual substances, their model is indeed incompatible with the classical formula that they seek to exemplify.

Thus far I have focused on worries about Moreland's and Craig's account of the Persons. I now turn to worries in the region of their treatment of God.

## 4 Worries About the Trinity "As a Whole"

Recall that, according to Moreland and Craig, God is absolutely identical with the Trinity "as a whole," a composite individual substance that has as proper parts the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Trinity "as a whole" is the only item that exemplifies the divine nature; the Persons do not. Finally, with respect to the Composition Question—the question of how it is that the Persons compose God—Moreland and Craig answer that just as Cerberus is a single physical organism, and Rover, Bowser, and Spike compose him *because* he, that very physical organism, *supports* Rover, Bowser, and Spike, so God is a single immaterial substance, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose God *because* God, that very immaterial substance, *supports* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In section 4.1, I focus on worries about their explanation of how the Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole." In 4.2, I focus on worries about the fact that the Trinity "as a whole" is not, on their view, a person. In 4.3, I express worries about whether Trinity Monotheism is a version of Monotheism in name only.

## 4.1. Composing and "Supporting"

According to Moreland and Craig, the Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole" because the Trinity "as a whole" *supports* the Persons. To help us see how this can be, they give us two analogies; unfortunately, neither analogy serves its purpose.

The first analogy is the Cerberus analogy. I have two worries about it. First of all, the story of Cerberus is unfit as an analogy. That is because it serves as an analogy only if there is exactly one dog in the story, exactly one item that exemplifies the canine nature, just as there is exactly one God in Trinity Monotheism, exactly one item that exemplifies the divine nature. But it is false that there is exactly one dog in the story. There are exactly three partially overlapping dogs, each of which instantiates the canine nature, and not a single one of them is **(p.119)** Cerberus. Cerberus (if there is such a thing) is an unnatural composite whose proper parts are three dogs, Rover, Bowser, and Spike; as such, Cerberus—Rover, Bowser, and Spike "as a whole," you might say—is not a dog at all. Think of it this way. Consider a particular pair of Siamese twins that share vital organs below the neck, call them "Jack" and "Jill"; let them compose a whole called "Twinsy." Jack and Jill are distinct humans even if they are partially overlapping. Jack and Jill each exemplify human nature, but Twinsy, whatever it is, does not exemplify human nature. Since there is no salient difference between the (false) claim that Twinsy is a human and the claim that Cerberus is a dog, we should infer that Cerberus is not

a dog.

If the story of Cerberus provides an analogy for anything in the vicinity of Social Trinitarianism, it provides an analogy for a Social Trinitarianism according to which there are three exemplifications of the divine nature, that is, a version that implies that there are three Gods, and that the Trinity "as a whole"—if there is such a composite thing—does not exemplify the divine nature at all. This is not Trinity Monotheism; it is the Social Trinitarianism of Richard Swinburne, which is avowedly tritheistic.[34]

One might object that although Jack and Jill are distinct *persons*, there exists exactly one human being in their vicinity, albeit an unusual one with two heads, namely Twinsy. It is because we confuse human beings and persons that we tend to think that Jack and Jill are distinct human beings. The same goes for Cerberus, *mutatis mutandis*. It is because we confuse dogs and "canine" persons that we tend to think that Rover, Bowser, and Spike are distinct dogs. Thus, although Rover, Bowser, and Spike are distinct "canine" persons, there exists exactly one dog in their vicinity, albeit an unusual dog with three heads, namely Cerberus.

What should we make of this objection? I submit that two considerations weigh heavily against it. First, it implies that a single dog can have three distinct, complete, independently functioning brains. This implication seems false since brains individuate mammals; three brains, three mammals. But if there exist three mammals, then it seems there exist three dogs. Second, the objection under discussion implies that if Rover, Bowser, and Spike were surgically separated so that each was supplied with functioning vital organs simultaneously resulting in three viable mammals, three *new dogs* would come into existence by the end of the surgery. But what would have happened to Rover, Bowser, and Spike by surgery's end? Clearly, they did not go out of existence (compare Jack and Jill, *mutatis mutandis*). And none of them is absolutely identical with any of the new dogs since, *ex hypothesi*, none of them were dogs prior to the surgery. Thus, either (*a*) there exist after the surgery three pairs of*completely* overlapping "canine" persons, one member of each pair being a new dog and the other not being a dog at all, or else (*b*) there exist after the surgery three new dogs none of which is a "canine" person but each of which is an individual substance that exemplifies the canine nature. Alternatively, contrary to what I asserted above, (*c*) there exists **(p.120)** after the surgery just one spatially scattered dog, namely Cerberus, and three surgically separated "canine" persons none of which is a dog: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. None of these options seems nearly as plausible as the simple suggestion that each of Rover, Bowser, and Spike were dogs prior

to and after surgery.[35]

My second worry about the Cerberus analogy is that even if Moreland and Craig were right about Cerberus, we have not the foggiest idea what they are saying. That is because even if Cerberus “supports” Rover, Bowser, and Spike, and even if that suffices for them to compose Cerberus, we have no idea what relation Moreland and Craig mean to refer to by the word “support.” I will develop this point shortly.

The second analogy makes matters worse. They tell us that, on their view, “God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings support one person.” But what is it, even vaguely, for my “individual being,” that is, the individual substance that is absolutely identical with me, to “support one person”? Well, presumably, the “one person” in question is the particular person with which I am absolutely identical. But in that case, by the transitivity of identity, the particular individual substance in question (me) is absolutely identical with the particular person in question (me). It follows by Leibniz's Law that if my “individual being” supports “one person,” namely me, then that person, the one I am absolutely identical with, supports my “individual being.” The supports relation turns out to be symmetric.

This has disastrous consequences for Trinity Monotheism. Return to the claim that “God…would be one being which supports three persons.” If we are to understand this claim “just as” we are to understand the claim that “our individual beings support one another,” and if we are to understand the latter in the natural way suggested in the last paragraph, then God, that single composite item, is absolutely identical with the three Persons, which is impossible.

To avoid this disaster, Moreland and Craig must say either that I am not absolutely identical with a particular individual substance, or else that the “one person” in question is not the particular person with whom I am absolutely identical. Neither option looks especially promising for those who are wedded to the Aristotelian claim that human persons are paradigmatic individual substances.

So, with the slightest bit of pressure, both the Cerberus analogy and the individual human person analogy buckle.

My second general worry in this area is that Moreland's and Craig's use of “supports” has no precedence in the English language. Suppose that there is some *x*, *y*, and *z* such that *x supports y* and *z*. Why should we infer that,

*therefore*, *y* and *z compose x*? The foundation of my house supports its walls, floors, roof and so on, but they do not *compose* the foundation. The worry here is intensified by the fact that there is no use of "support" and "compose" in ordinary parlance such that supporting entails composing, as a look at the *Oxford English Dictionary* will reveal. Without, at a minimum, a stipulative definition in terms that we can **(p.121)** understand, we have no idea what they mean by "supports" and hence we have no idea what they mean by the claim that the Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole" because the latter *supports* the former; we have no idea what proposition is expressed, we have no idea what model is proposed for our consideration.[36]

### 4.2. The Divinity of the Trinity "as a Whole"

Moreland and Craig say that each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is absolutely identical with a distinct person, and they say that the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with a particular immaterial mental substance, that is, a soul. In order to avoid saying that there are *four* persons in the vicinity of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity "as a whole"—they say that, although the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with a particular soul, the Trinity "as a whole" is *not* absolutely identical with a particular person. There is, therefore, at least one soul that is not absolutely identical with a particular person. In that case, the Trinity "as a whole"–that is, God, on their view—is not absolutely identical with a particular person. God, that is, is not a person. Consequently, God is not "equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination." That is not to say that God does not have proper parts that are thus equipped; it is only to say that God itself lacks the equipment. There are several implications we might draw out here. Let me mention three.

First, recall the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Creation is an intentional act. An intentional act cannot be performed by anything but a person. God is not a person, say Moreland and Craig. Thus, if they are right, God did not create the heavens and the earth; indeed, He could not have done so. The first sentence of the Bible expresses a necessary falsehood. Not a good start!

**(p.122)** To be sure, a composite can "borrow" properties from its proper parts, under certain conditions. In that case, can we not say that since the Son created the heavens and the earth, God did—given that the Son is a proper part of God? After all, if I am a composite of flesh and blood, then *I* am bleeding if *my arm* is

bleeding.

This objection fails. For there can be no “lending” of a property unless the borrower is antecedently the sort of thing that can have it. Unless I am the sort of thing that can bleed—a flesh and blood composite, say—then it is strictly and literally *false* that if my arm is bleeding I am bleeding. For example, if I am absolutely identical with an immaterial mental substance, then it is just plain false that I am bleeding if my arm is bleeding. Immaterial things are not the sorts of things that can bleed. Obviously, an immaterial thing might *possess* something— say, a body made of flesh and blood—such that if a part of it bleeds then it too bleeds. But *x*'s possessing a *y* which is such that if a part of *y* is F then *y* is F no more implies that *x* is F than does my possessing a tire whose tube can be inflated to 3,000psi implies that I can be inflated to 3,000psi. Equally obviously, we all use the words “I am bleeding” in certain circumstances, and we do so without a thought as to whether we are the sorts of things that can bleed. But this fact about our usage no more implies that we express truths when we use “I am bleeding” than our use of “The sun moved behind the trees” implies that we express a truth when we use it.

The upshot is that, as in banking, borrowing and lending in ontology have their conditions and limits. Unless God is antecedently the sort of thing that can act intentionally—that is, unless God is a person—God cannot borrow the property of creating the heavens and the earth from the Son. God cannot create. Of course, creation of the heavens and the earth is only one act attributed to God in the biblical texts. All other acts attributed to God will likewise turn out to be, strictly and literally, false.

Second, Judeo-Christian anthropology will have to be remade. No other text is more central to an understanding of what we are than this: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.” While no image has all of the features of that of which it is an image, the tradition has it that a human being is made in the image of God insofar as he or she “is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination,” to borrow an apt description from Moreland and Craig. Unfortunately, this is the description of a *person*, which they say God is not. In what respects, then, are we made in the image of an individual substance that is void of all personal attributes?

Third, recall that, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons do not exemplify the divine nature, only the Trinity “as a whole” enjoys that privilege.

Thus, on their view, the Trinity "as a whole" at once exemplifies the divine nature and yet *fails* to be a person. This is not a high view of the divine nature, I take it; indeed, it is abysmally low. To see just how low it is, consider what sorts of properties theists typically associate with the divine nature that cannot be exemplified by something that fails to be a self-reflective agent capable of **(p.123)** self-determination. Without going into the details, I take it that the list includes noteworthy members such as omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable moral goodness, and worship-worthiness.[37]

Moreland and Craig are not as forthcoming about this implication as they ought to be. On the only occasion they begin to address it, they tell us that "when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent…." That is a good start. But look at how they continue the sentence: "rather, God has these properties because the persons do."[38] God is not a person or agent, yet God is omnipotent, omniscient, and the like. What! If God is not a person or agent, then God does not know anything, cannot act, cannot choose, cannot be morally good, cannot be worthy of worship. This is the God of Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism.[39]

### 4.3. Trinity "Monotheism" and Monotheism

Monotheists assert that there exists exactly one God. Moreland and Craig say that they assert *the same thing*. This is not the case, however. What they affirm when they use the words "there exists exactly one God" is not the same thing that monotheists affirm when they use those words.

When monotheists assert that there exists exactly one God, they affirm the existence of something of a certain sort, *a* God; they affirm the existence of something that belongs to a certain supernatural kind if you will, namely divinity. There exists exactly one of *those* things, they say; not many. The claim that there exists exactly one God cannot be understood unless the word "God" in that claim is a class or kind term and not a proper name. That is not to say that there is no use of "God" as a proper name; obviously, there is. It is only to say that when monotheists claim that there exists exactly one God, they are contrasting "one" with "many" and there is no grammatical sense to be made of "one God" in contrast with "many Gods" if "God" is being used as a proper name in both cases. Proper names do not take the plural; class terms do. So Monotheism is a thesis about Gods and the thesis is this: there is one and only one of them.

The point I want to make here is not merely a point of grammar; it is a point of history. There are no monotheists unless traditional Jews are monotheists, and when they assert that there exists exactly one God, they affirm that there exists a **(p.124)** certain number of Gods and the number is one. Moreover, traditional Christians agree with traditional Jews on this score. After all, when the early Christians were accused by their Jewish contemporaries of being polytheists, they responded by insisting that, *like their accusers*, they too affirmed that there exists exactly one God. They *agreed* with them. What they agreed to was what the Jews themselves believed, that there exists a certain number of Gods, and that that number is *one*. It is not an historical accident that the Athanasian Creed (ca. AD 500) affirms that "they are not three Gods, but one God" and that the Creeds of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) begin with the words, "We believe in one God."

The upshot here is that academic Trinitarians cannot mean whatever they like when they insist that they are monotheists. Grammar and history do not permit it, and this point applies to Trinity Monotheism as well, particularly the version of Trinity Monotheism put forward by Moreland and Craig.

Despite their good intentions, their version of Trinity Monotheism is not a version of Monotheism; the tenets of their position do not permit it. Monotheists disagree with them over what properties are included in the nature of a God. Moreland and Craig insist that the divine nature includes the property of being triune and that the divine nature lacks the property of being a person in the minimal sense. Monotheists insist that the divine nature does not include the property of being triune and they insist that the divine nature does include the property of being worthy of worship, which implies being a person in the minimal sense. Monotheists as diverse as Christians and Jews (not to mention Muslims)*agree* that there exists exactly one God, one instance of that supernatural sort of thing, *a* God. If nothing could be a God unless the nature it exemplified included the property of being triune and lacked the property of being a person, then Christians and Jews would not be in agreement on this score. But they are. So, according to Monotheism, something can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being triune and nothing can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being a person. Either way, Moreland and Craig offer us a version of Trinity Monotheism that is *not* a version of Monotheism.[40]

## (p.125) 5. Conclusion

We began with a simple argument: the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are inconsistent with each other. By way of response, Moreland and Craig suggested that we read the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim, not the Person Identity Claim. That response, however, led to the Challenge of Polytheism, to which they responded by invoking their Trinity Monotheism. Unfortunately, their Trinity Monotheism—both on the periphery and at the core—has intolerable consequences for Trinitarianism, or so I have argued. If I am right, then the Challenge of Polytheism remains on the table for Trinity Monotheism; at any rate, I cannot see how Moreland's and Craig's version of Trinity Monotheism has removed it.[41]

Notes:

(1) In what follows, I will assume that the relation of sameness in question is absolute identity. My assumption should not be mistaken for endorsement, however. Peter van Inwagen has constructed a logic of relative identity, and in that logic the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are consistent both with themselves and a host of other orthodox Trinitarian and incarnational claims. See his “And Yet They are not Three Gods but One God,” and “Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person,” in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1995). Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea have defined a relation of numerical sameness with neither absolute nor relative identity, and it, for all I know, might be the relation in virtue of which the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are compatible. See their “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* [this vol., Ch. 14].

(2) My first interaction with the Trinitarianism of Moreland and Craig was through Craig's “Toward a Tenable Social Trinitarianism,” presented at the Seventy-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Society for the Philosophy of Religion, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, March 2003, which I commented on at that meeting. Since then, I learned that the paper was excerpted from chapter 29, in their enormous,coauthored *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 575–96 [see Ch. 5 of this volume].

(3) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590–1 [this vol., p. 96].

(4) Brian Leftow coined the term. See “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis; Daniel Kendall, SJ; Gerald O’Collins, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press,

1999), 203–49 [this vol., Ch. 4].

(5) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590 [this vol., pp. 95–96].

(6) The inference this sentence contains is fallacious. The individual who is God can have a property essentially even if that property isnot partly constitutive ofthe divine nature. Compare: mycat, Socrates, can have a property essentially even if that property is not partially constitutive of the feline nature.

(7) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591 [this vol., p. 96].

(8) Ibid.

(9) Ibid., 593.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid., 593–4 [this vol., p. 99]. The reference to chapter 11 is a reference to chapter 11 of their book.

(13) Ibid., 215 ff.

(14) Ibid., 232. Whether Moreland and Craig think that there are no immaterial individual substances other than souls is none of my concern here.

(15) Direct awareness through introspection of one's self, they write, “shows that a person is not identical to his or her body in whole or in part or to one's experiences, but rather is the thing that has them. In short, one is a mental substance,” that is, a soul (239); “[t]he clearest and most obvious case of a substance is in our own self-acquaintance” (300). Part 3 of *Philosophical Foundations* is peppered with the implication that each human soul we are acquainted with is–in the sense of absolute identity– a human person.

(16) This seems to be implied by the sentence, “[w]e naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons.” Of course, by their lights, this “natural equation” is *false*. We make the equation because each *human* soul we are familiar with is absolutely identical with a particular person, but the universal equation of souls and persons turns out to be a hasty generalization. In particular, the equation is false since, on their view, the Father is absolutely identical with a particular person but not with a particular individual substance. Likewise for the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(17) Cf. Peter van Inwagen, “Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person,” and Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 263–5.

(18) Argument: the conjunction of

((1)) God is absolutely identical with the three Persons
and
((2)) The Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with God,
which is the First Tenet, entails by the transitivity of absolute identity that
((3)) The Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with the three Persons.
But recall the composition claim:
((4)) The three Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole.”
Using the term “the *p*s” as a plural variable which collectively refers to the *p*s and not to any object which has the *p*s as its parts or members,
((5)) Necessarily, for any *p*s and for any thing *x*, if the ps compose *x*, then *x* is not absolutely identical with the *p*s.
The denial of (3) follows from (4) and (5).

(19) Moreland and Craig think that there is an “is” of composition, as exhibited in sentences like “Socrates is flesh and bone.” See Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 174–5. Whether there is an “is” of composition or not, the fact that they *think* there is adds some reason to suppose that they mean to say that God *is composed* of the Persons when they say that God is the Persons.

(20) Moreland and Craig, Philosophical Foundations, 238–43. They have in mind properties such as a direct awareness of the self, the irreducibility of the first-person perspective, the capacity to retain identity through change, freedom, and the unity of consciousness. My point is that even if these properties can only be had by immaterial *persons*, it does not follow that they can only be had by immaterial *individual substances*–provided, of course, that there can be immaterial persons that are not immaterial individual substances, which, according to them, there can.

(21) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 279–80.

(22) Ibid., 594.

(23) Ibid., 610.

(24) I owe this qualification to Bill Craig. In what follows, I will leave it tacit. We might not be satisfied with the qualification. After all, as Mike Rea pointed out to me, it is not at all clear what it is for a proper part to be *distinctive* of a species.

(25) What if a cat dies and the soft tissue of its corpse rots, dries, and blows away, but its skeleton remains pretty much intact. Is the skeleton feline? It seems so, but it is not if Moreland and Craig are correct; they say a cat's DNA and skeleton are feline because "they *are* parts of a cat" (my emphasis, note the tense), and in this case, the skeleton is no longer a proper part of a cat, even though it once was. Moreland and Craig can say (if they would like; some Aristotelian substance theorists do not) that a skeleton is feline just in case it is, *or was*, a proper part of a cat. Another case: can God create a feline skeleton *ex nihilo*, without it ever being a proper part of a cat? If so, we need to fiddle with their account some more. Consider it done, if you think it needs doing. For the sake of expository simplicity, I am going to stick with the simple present tense version in what follows.

(26) As you try to think of counterexamples to this premise, keep in mind that I am assuming the simple present tense version of Moreland's and Craig's claim that *a cat's DNA and skeleton are fully and unambiguously feline because "they are parts of a cat.*" See the previous note. So construct your counterexamples in accordance with that charitable assumption.

(27) Frances Howard-Snyder insists that there is a third version of the cat analogy lurking here. Recall that, strictly speaking, a whole is a part of itself. To be sure, it is not a *proper* part of itself, but it is, as they say, an *improper* part of itself. A cat, therefore, is a part–an improper part–of a cat. Of course, Socrates's skeleton is also a part of a cat, namely Socrates himself. So Socrates and his skeleton share a certain feature: being a part of a cat. Thus, we have

> *The Cat Analogy (3)* There is one and only one property of felinity whereby something can be fully feline, namely being a part of a cat, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being a proper part of a cat and the second way is by being an improper part of a cat.

Dale Tuggy insists that there is a fourth version of the cat analogy:

> *The Cat Analogy (4)* There is one and only one way to be feline, namely by exemplifying the nature of a cat; but "feline" is predicable of items that are not feline, e.g., certain proper parts of cats.

Version three inherits some of the difficulties mentioned in the text. Version four implies that the Persons are not divine even if “divinity” is predicable of them.

I am indebted to Jeff Jordan for putting me onto this worry about the cat analogy, and to Frances Howard-Snyder and Hud Hudson for helping me to work it out properly.

(28) I take it that counterpossibles can, in principle, be false. Depending on how sympathetic you are to false counterpossibles, you will find this objection convincing. Thanks to Mike Rea for helping me to see how to put this point.

(29) [Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*,] 214.

(30) Ibid.

(31) Ibid., 215–19.

(32) If (4) is a strict necessary condition and God satisfies it, then I see no reason why each of the Persons does not also.

(33) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 594.

(34) Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 8.

(35) Thanks to Joshua Spencer and Hud Hudson for making me alive to worries about Cerberus.

(36) I sometimes worry that with all this talk of “supporting,” Moreland and Craig mean to endorse a Lockean rather than an Aristotelian theory of substance. According to Locke, and in agreement with Aristotle, properties cannot subsist on their own; there are no free-floating properties. A substance, says Locke, is that which underlies or supports properties. It is that in which properties inhere. Perhaps Moreland and Craig mean to suggest that God is the substance—the Lockean bare substratum—that supports the Persons, those discrete sets of powers sufficient for personhood. If so, then we have been misled by the talk about the Persons *composing* God, since a Lockean bare substratum cannot be a composite. Indeed, it is not clear what a Lockean *bare* substratum is; he called it a “something I know not what.” To make matters worse, Locke's theory implies that an individual substance is something that, in itself, has no properties whatsoever; that is why it is called a bare substratum. Unfortunately, that is hardly intelligible. But, even if it were, it would not be of use to Moreland and

Craig. They want to say God is absolutely identical with a particular immaterial substance and that God exemplifies the divine nature; but, if the substance in question is a Lockean bare substratum, then God, in itself, has no properties, and hence no essential properties; as such, it does not exemplify any nature, divine or otherwise. Like all theists, Trinitarians will naturally resist this suggestion.

(37) An anonymous referee asserted that *every* model of the Trinity must say that God is not a person. So far as I can see, this assertion does little more than express the referee's myopic view of the options, not to mention his or her disregard for the plain sense of Scripture and tradition.

(38) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591 [this vol., p. 96].

(39) Note the fallacy in the text at page 591: “the whole can have a property because some part has it.*Thus*, when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent; rather, God has these properties because the persons do” (emphasis added). The inference is valid only if God is the sort of thing that antecedently can have the properties that God's proper parts have, and the denial of personhood and agency to God is exactly that which undercuts the validity of the inference from the Persons having maximal power and knowledge to God having those features.

(40) It is important to see that nothing I have said here implies that the one and only thing that in fact exemplifies the divine nature lacks the essential property of *being triune*. Something can have an essential property and yet not have it in virtue of being the kind of thing that it is. Perhaps that is the case with the Christian God; indeed, it had better be if Christians are to be Monotheists.

The argument here applies with equal force to other attempts by Social Trinitarians to “cling to respectability as monotheists,” e.g., Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Plantinga offers “three ways” in which Social Trinitarians can affirm that there exists exactly one God: (1) There exists exactly one God if “God” isused as “the peculiar designator of the Father,” as the one and only “font of divinity”; (2) there exists exactly one God if “God” is the proper name of “a set of excellent properties severally necessary and jointly sufficient for their possessor to be divine”; and (3) there exists exactly one God if “God” “is used as a designator of the…one divine family or monarchy or community, namely, the Holy Trinity itself.”

(41) Thanks to Ben Bradley, William Lane Craig, Frances Howard-Snyder, Hud Hudson, Jeff Jordan, William Kilborn, Shieva Kleinschmidt, Christian Lee, Brain Leftow, Michael Rea, Joshua Spencer, Dale Tuggy, and an anonymous referee for comments on predecessors of this paper.

# Trinity Monotheism

**Daniel Howard-Snyder**

## 1 Trinity Monotheism and the Challenge of Polytheism

According to the Athanasian Creed, “the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God,” that is, “each Person by himself is God”; nevertheless, “they are not three Gods, but one God.” These words imply that the Father is *not a different* God from the Son, and if not a different God, then the*same* God. The Athanasian Creed also affirms that “there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.” These words imply that the Father is a *different* Person from the Son, and if a different Person, then *not the same* Person. I take it that the Athanasian Creed here expresses two claims that are partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity.

*The Sameness Claim*: the Father is the same God as the Son.

*The Difference Claim*: the Father is not the same Person as the Son.

These two claims arguably contradict each other. If we suppose that the relation of Sameness that is affirmed in the Sameness Claim is absolute identity, then the Sameness Claim is an abbreviation of the following conjunction: The Father has the property of being a God, the Son has the property of being a God, and

*The Person Identity Claim*: the Father is absolutely identical with the Son.

In like fashion, if we suppose that the relation of sameness that is denied in the Difference Claim is absolute identity (and if we suppose that the Father is a Person and that the Son is a Person, two other claims partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity), then the Difference Claim is an abbreviation of the following conjunction: The Father has the property of being a Person, the Son has the property of being a Person, and the denial of the Person Identity Claim, namely, the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son. Thus, given our suppositions, the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim cannot both be true; their conjunction entails a contradiction.

How might the Trinitarian respond? One option is to deny that the relation of sameness that is affirmed in the Sameness Claim and that is denied in the Difference **(p.101)** Claim is absolute identity.[1] Another option is to insist that, properly understood, the conjunction of the Sameness Claim and the Difference

Claim does not lead to contradiction, even if the relation of sameness expressed in both claims is absolute identity. This is the route taken by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig.[2]

According to Moreland and Craig, if the Sameness Claim is to be read in a coherent fashion, it must be interpreted as a way of ascribing the same property or office of divinity to each of the Father and the Son.[3] In that case, the Sameness Claim should be interpreted as a conjunction of the following three claims: (1) the Father is divine, (2) the Son is divine, and (3)

> *The Property Identity Claim*: the property of divinity that the Father instantiates is absolutely identical with the property of divinity that the Son instantiates.

The Father and the Son share in common the very same property in virtue of which each of them is divine; it is false that the Father exemplifies one property of divinity and the Son exemplifies another property of divinity. There exists exactly one property of divinity that each of the Persons exemplifies. In contrast with the Sameness Claim understood as implying the Person Identity Claim, the Sameness Claim understood as implying the Property Identity Claim does not imply that the Father is absolutely identical with the Son. Interpreting the Sameness Claim in this way avoids the contradiction argued for above.

Unfortunately, reading the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim arguably contradicts another claim that is partially constitutive of the doctrine of the Trinity, namely

> *Monotheism*: there exists exactly one God.

Here is why. First, the Difference Claim entails that the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son. Second, the Sameness Claim, understood as implying the Property Identity Claim, entails both that the Father has the property of being divine and that the Son has the property of being divine. But, third, necessarily, for any *x* and y, if *x* is not absolutely identical with *y* but *x* has the property of **(p.102)** being divine and *y* has the property of being divine, then *x* is a God and *y* is a God and *x* is not the same God as y. It follows that the Father is a God and the Son is a God, and the Father is not the same God as the Son. Fourthly, necessarily, for any *x* and y, if *x* is a God and *y* is a God and *x* is not the same God as y, then there are two Gods. Thus, if we read the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim, then, given the Difference Claim, it is

false that there exists exactly one God—which contradicts Monotheism. Let us call the argument of this paragraph the “Challenge of Polytheism.”

## 2 Trinity Monotheism Displayed

Moreland's and Craig's response to the Challenge of Polytheism displays three tenets central to their version of Social Trinitarianism, what they call *Trinity Monotheism*.[4] To gain a clearer view of these tenets and to highlight their (alleged) utility, I will display in section 2 how they can be used to respond to three worries, beginning with the Challenge of Polytheism.

### 2.1. The Challenge of Polytheism

Moreland and Craig propose to meet the Challenge of Polytheism by denying its third premise, namely the following:

> Necessarily, for any *x* and y, if *x* is not absolutely identical with *y* but *x* has the property of being divine and *y* has the property of being divine, then *x* is a God and *y* is a God and *x* is not the same God as *y*.

According to Moreland and Craig, while the Persons are each divine and absolutely distinct, they are not distinct *Gods*. For on their view, there exists exactly one God, namely the Trinity “as a whole,” and no Person is absolutely identical with the Trinity “as a whole.” Rather, each Person is a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.” Still, each of the Persons is “fully and unambiguously” divine. It is just that they are not divine in the way in which the Trinity “as a whole” is divine; they are fully divine in another, second way. Consequently, there is a way of being divine which is such that each Person is divine in that way and one's being divine in that way does not imply that one is a God.

Here we see at work all three of the core tenets of Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism:

> *The First Tenet*: the Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with God.
>
> *The Second Tenet*: there is more than one way to be fully divine.
>
> **(p.103)** *The Composition Claim*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose the Trinity “as a whole,” that is, the Persons are proper parts of the Trinity “as a whole.”

Of course, whether Moreland and Craig can meet the Challenge of Polytheism

by deploying the core tenets of their Trinity Monotheism depends on whether those tenets are possibly true and consistent with orthodoxy, both individually and jointly. One might worry that the Second Tenet is especially dubious. How could one be fully divine without exemplifying the nature of divinity?

Moreland and Craig offer a distinctively Christian answer to this question.[5] They say that according to Christian orthodoxy God is triune; moreover God does not just happen to be triune. Consequently, the property of *being triune* is an essential property of God, in which case it is a property of the divine nature.[6] But if the property of being triune is a property of the divine nature, then none of the Persons exemplifies the divine nature; for none of them exemplifies the property of being triune. But the Persons *are* fully divine, and hence there must be a second way of being fully divine, a way other than that of exemplifying the divine nature. This second way is the way of being a proper part of something that exemplifies the divine nature, that is, the Trinity "as a whole." To help us see how it could be that the Persons are fully divine simply in virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole," they ask us to consider an analogy.

> One way of being feline is to instantiate the nature of a cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat's DNA or skeleton is feline, even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a sort of downgraded or attenuated felinity: a cat's skeleton is fully and unambiguously feline. Indeed, a cat is just a feline animal, as a cat's skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if a cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, in virtue of what is a cat's DNA or skeleton feline? One plausible answer is that they are parts of a cat. This suggests that we could think of the persons of the Trinity as divine because they are parts of the Trinity, that is, parts of God. Now obviously, the persons are not parts of God in the sense in which a skeleton is part of a cat; but given that the Father, for example, is not the whole Godhead, it seem undeniable that there is some sort of part—whole relation obtaining between the persons of the Trinity and the entire Godhead.[7]

The upshot, then, is this. There are not four Gods but just one because the divine nature includes the property of being triune and there exists exactly one item which is such that it exemplifies that property, namely the Trinity "as a whole." Still, each of the three Persons is fully divine since each is a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole." So one way to be divine is to instantiate the divine nature; this is how the Trinity "as a whole" gets to be divine. A second way to be divine is to be a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole"; this is how each of the Persons

gets to be divine. The cat analogy is supposed to help us see how this latter claim could be true.

### **(p.104)** 2.2. The Diminished Divinity Problem

One might worry that this response to the Challenge of Polytheism comes at a steep price: the divinity of the Persons has been diminished. For if the Persons do not instantiate the divine nature and they are divine in the way in which a cat's skeleton is feline, then they are no more God-like than a feline skeleton is cat-like, which is to say they are hardly God-like at all. You might put the point this way: if the sense in which the Persons are “divine” approximates the sense in which a cat's skeleton is “feline,” then the sense in which the Persons are “divine” approximates the sense in which any one of the properties that are constitutive of full divinity is “divine” or the sense in which a divine plan is “divine.” But the property of being, say, worthy of worship, although doubtless divine in this sense, lacks what Christians have had in mind when they affirm the full divinity of each of the Persons; similarly for, say, God's plan to redeem Israel. Neither the property of being worthy of worship nor God's plan to redeem Israel exemplify those properties that Christians have had in mind when they affirm the full divinity of each of the Persons, even though the property of being worthy of worship and God's plan to redeem Israel are both “fully and unambiguously” divine. Apparently, one can be fully divine—in this second sense of “divine”—while lacking the traditional attributes of God. It appears, then, that the Challenge of Polytheism is met at the expense of the “Diminished Divinity Problem,” as I will call it. That is a price no Christian should pay.

Moreland and Craig argue that “[f]ar from downgrading the divinity of the persons, such an account [as theirs] can be very illuminating of their contribution to the divine nature.”

> For parts can possess properties which the whole does not, and the whole can have a property because some part has it. Thus, when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent; rather God has these properties because the persons do. Divine attributes like omniscience, omnipotence, and goodness are grounded in the persons’ possessing these properties, while divine attributes like necessity, aseity, and eternity are not so grounded. With respect to the latter, the persons have these properties because God as a whole has them. For parts can have some properties in virtue of the wholes of which they are parts. The point is that if we think of the divinity of the persons in terms of

> a part—whole relation to the Trinity that God is, then their deity seems in no way diminished because they are not instances of the divine nature.[8]

So, according to Moreland and Craig, being divine by virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity does not diminish the divinity of the Persons, contrary to the Diminished Divinity Problem. Each of the Persons has those properties traditional theists typically associate with divinity, for example, omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable moral goodness, necessity, aseity, eternity.

### **(p.105)** 2.3. The Composition Question

Moreland and Craig rightly observe that "[a]ll of this leaves us still wondering… how three persons could be parts of the same being, rather than three separate beings. What is the salient difference between three divine persons who are each a being and three divine persons who are together one being?"[9]

This is an excellent question: how exactly is it that the three Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole"? Let us call it the Composition Question.

Moreland and Craig suggest that the answer can be seen by reflecting on an analogy. "In Greco-Roman mythology," they write,

> there is said to stand guarding the gates of Hades a three-headed dog named Cerberus. We may suppose that Cerberus has three brains and therefore three distinct states of consciousness of whatever it is like to be a dog. Therefore, Cerberus, while a sentient being, does not have a unified consciousness. He has three consciousnesses. We could even assign proper names to each of them: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. These centers of consciousness are entirely discrete and might well come into conflict with one another. Still, in order for Cerberus to be biologically viable, not to mention in order to function effectively as a guard dog, there must be a considerable degree of cooperation among Rover, Bowser, and Spike. Despite the diversity of his mental states, Cerberus is clearly one dog. He is a single biological organism exemplifying a canine nature. Rover, Bowser, and Spike may be said to be canine, too, though they are not three dogs, but parts of the one dog Cerberus. If Hercules were attempting to enter Hades, and Spike snarled at him or bit his leg, he might well report, "Cerberus snarled at me" or "Cerberus attacked me."…We can enhance the Cerberus story by investing him with rationality and self-consciousness. In that case, Rover, Bowser, and Spike are plausibly personal agents and Cerberus a tri-

> personal being. Now if we were asked what makes Cerberus a single being despite his multiple minds, we should doubtless reply that it is because he has a single physical body.[10]

One might initially worry that the Trinity "as a whole" does not have a physical body, and consequently that the analogy fails to illuminate how the Persons can compose the Trinity "as a whole." Alive to this worry, Moreland and Craig write:

> [S]uppose Cerberus were to be killed, and his minds survive the death of his body. In what sense would they still be one being? How would they Differ intrinsically from three exactly similar minds which have always been unembodied? Since the divine persons are, prior to the Incarnation, three unembodied minds, in virtue of what are they one being rather than three individual beings?[11]

To answer this question, Moreland and Craig dispense with the Cerberus analogy and answer it with reference to their view regarding the nature of the soul:

> The question of what makes several parts constitute a single object rather than distinct objects is a difficult one. But in this case perhaps we can get some insight by reflecting on the nature of the soul. We have argued that souls are immaterial substances and have seen that it is plausible that animals have souls (see chap. 11). Souls come in a spectrum of **(p.106)** varying capacities and faculties. Higher animals such as chimpanzees and dolphins possess souls much more richly endowed with powers than those of iguanas and turtles. What makes the human soul a person is that the human soul is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination. Now God is very much like an unembodied soul; indeed, as a mental substance God just seems to be a soul. We naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons. But the reason human souls are individual persons is because each soul is equipped with one set of rational faculties sufficient for being a person. Suppose, then, that God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of consciousness, intentionality, and volition, as Social Trinitarians maintain. God would clearly not be three discrete souls because the cognitive faculties in question are all faculties belonging to just

> one soul, one immaterial substance. God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings support one person. Such a model of Trinity Monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula "three persons in one substance."[12]

What should we make of these passages that are directed at the Composition Question, especially the last passage? Several preliminary observations are in order.

First, with respect to the Cerberus analogy, it becomes clear that Moreland and Craig meant to say something like this: Cerberus is a single physical organism, and Rover, Bowser, and Spike compose Cerberus *because* Cerberus, that very physical organism, *supports* Rover, Bowser, and Spike; analogously, God is a single immaterial substance, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose God *because* God, that very immaterial substance, *supports* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, Moreland and Craig identify themselves as proponents of a substance metaphysic whose broad contours they describe as Aristotelian.[13] This metaphysic distinguishes individual (or primary) substances or beings from other sorts of things. According to Moreland and Craig, among the immaterial individual substances are souls, which earlier (in chapter 11 of their book) they identified as "mental substances that have mental properties."[14] Each *soul*—that is, each *mental* substance—is absolutely identical with a particular *immaterial* individual substance. Now, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons are persons, but no Person is absolutely identical with an individual substance. There is no individual substance *x* such that the Father is absolutely identical with *x*, even though there is some person *y* such that the Father is absolutely identical with y. And the same goes for the Son and the Holy Spirit. Apparently, then, a person can fail to be absolutely identical with an individual substance.

**(p.107)** On first reading, this claim is liable to induce an incredulous stare. After all, in the Aristotelian tradition, persons are paradigmatic individual substances. *You*, for example, are an individual substance, as am I. Perhaps Moreland and Craig do not wish to deny that *we* are absolutely identical with individual substances. Indeed, it appears that they do not.[15] It appears that they only wish to deny that the three Persons are absolutely identical with individual substances.[16]

Third, Moreland's and Craig's contention that the Father is absolutely identical with a particular person but not with a particular individual substance is mirrored

by another thesis, namely that God is absolutely identical with a particular individual substance but not with a particular person. God has three persons as proper parts, but God, the Trinity "as a whole," is not a person. Strictly speaking, using personal pronouns to refer to God presupposes, on their view, the *false* proposition that God is a person. And here I do not mean by "person" anything distinctively modern or Cartesian or anything else (allegedly) objectionable. I have in mind the concept of whatever is, strictly and literally, the referent of a personal pronoun.[17] Even in that minimalist sense of "person," the suggestion that the Christian God is not a person is most unusual, to say the least.

Fourth, according to Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism, an individual substance can *be* three persons. God is such a substance, they say. "God, though one soul [that is, one immaterial individual substance], would not *be* one person but three persons" (emphasis added). This is an unfortunate choice of words since they might be mistaken for the claim that God is absolutely identical with the three Persons. This claim is false since the relation of absolute identity is a one—one relation, not one—many; moreover, it is incompatible with the conjunction of the First Tenet and the Composition Claim.[18] I suggest that when Moreland and Craig tell us that "God, though one soul, would not be**(p.108)** one person but three," they mean that, although the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with a particular soul, It *has as proper parts* three absolutely distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[19]

Although this is not the place to spell out the details, what has been said so far seems to pose some difficulties for the internal consistency of the More-land—Craig take on the philosophical foundations for a Christian worldview, at least as those foundations are expressed in their book by that title. One difficulty is that it appears that none of the arguments for substance dualism that they offer is valid. After all, the Father has each mental property Moreland and Craig ascribe to me, each one of which, they say, is sufficient for my being a mental substance. But if a person can have each of those properties without being a mental substance, as is the case with the Father, then how does the fact that I have them preclude the possibility that I am a person that is not a mental substance? It looks like my having those mental properties does not guarantee that I am a mental substance, a soul.[20] Another difficulty is that none of the Persons has libertarian freedom since, according to Moreland and Craig, none of the Persons is a genuine substance and "a necessary condition for libertarian freedom is that the agent be a genuine substance in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas."[21] Of course, it also seems that only persons can have libertarian freedom. If so, then, since God

is not a person on their view, God does not have libertarian freedom either. But if neither the Persons nor the Trinity “as a whole” has libertarian freedom, then nothing in the vicinity of the Christian God has libertarian freedom. A third difficulty, which is more central to **(p.109)** Trinitarian concerns, is that their argument for a plurality of persons within the Godhead relies on the premise that “creation is a result of God's free will.”[22] But, again, according to their Trinity Monotheism, God is not a person; thus, God has no free will. Finally, their Trinity Monotheism seems to be incompatible with their theory of the Incarnation since, according to their Trinity Monotheism, the Son is *not* an individual substance but, on their theory of the Incarnation, the Son is an individual substance. For, they tell us, on their theory of the Incarnation, the Logos, which is absolutely identical with the Son, “completes the individual human nature of Christ by furnishing it with a rational soul, which is the Logos himself.”[23] It cannot be the case that a particular rational soul is the Logos himself while the Logos himself *is not* a particular soul at all.

Although I would like to report that Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism is a smashing success, I am afraid that I must instead register several worries. In section 3, I emphasize worries with respect to what they have to say about the Persons; in section 4, I emphasize worries with respect to what they have to say about God.

## 3 Worries About the Persons

As we saw above, according to Moreland and Craig, the Trinity “as a whole” is divine because it exemplifies the divine nature. Each Person of the Trinity is also divine, but not because each exemplifies the divine nature; rather, each Person is divine because each is a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole.” To explain how this could be, they offered the cat analogy. A cat is fully feline because it exemplifies the feline nature. The skeleton of a cat is also fully feline but not because it exemplifies the feline nature; rather, the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat. In the present section, I will first express three worries about the cat analogy as an analogy. Then, having granted the analogy for the sake of argument, I will urge that Moreland's and Craig's part—whole explanation of how the Persons could be fully divine fails. Finally, I will argue that the Persons are individual substances, given the conditions that Moreland and Craig themselves lay down.

### 3.1. The Cat Analogy

Moreland and Craig assert that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat. This implies that being a proper part of a cat is sufficient for being feline. This implication is false, however. First, since organs can be transplanted from a member of one species into a member of another species, **(p.110)** something that is not feline can nevertheless be a proper part of a cat. Being a proper part of a cat, therefore, is not sufficient for being feline. Second, since the part—whole relation is transitive, it follows that if being a proper part of a cat is sufficient for being feline, then each of the atoms and molecules of a cat are feline—which is false.

These two worries are minor, perhaps. Instead of saying that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part of a cat, Moreland and Craig can say that the skeleton of a cat is fully feline because it is a proper part *that is distinctive of the species*.[24]

My third worry about the cat analogy is major. According to Moreland and Craig, *there are two ways of being feline*. What could be meant by these words? Only one of two things, so far as I can see:

> *The Cat Analogy (1)* There is one and only one property of felinity whereby something can be fully feline, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being a cat and the second way is by being a proper part of a cat.
>
> *The Cat Analogy (2)* Words of the form "*x* is feline" are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully feline: the first property is the property of being a cat and the second property is the property of being a proper part of a cat.

Which of these do Moreland and Craig have in mind? I think the text can be read either way, but the first version seems to me the least likely candidate since it fits least well with their attempt to meet the Challenge of Polytheism and to solve the Diminished Divinity Problem. Let me explain.

The cat analogy is supposed to illuminate how it could be that there are two ways to be (fully) divine, which is the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism. But if version one is the right way to understand the cat analogy, then we must understand the Second Tenet in like fashion:

> *The Second Tenet (1)* There is one and only one property of divinity whereby something can be fully divine, but there are two distinct ways to

> exemplify it: the first way is by being the Trinity "as a whole" and the second way is by being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole."

Note that version one of the Second Tenet implies that the three Persons exemplify exactly the same property of divinity that the Trinity "as a whole" exemplifies, that the property by virtue of which each of the Persons is divine is absolutely identical with the property by virtue of which the Trinity "as a whole" is divine, and that there is no other property by virtue of which something can be divine.

From a Trinitarian point of view, the theological implications of Trinity Monotheism combined with version one of the Second Tenet are odious in the extreme. For Trinitarianism insists that each of the Persons is divine, and Trinity **(p.111)** Monotheism insists that the composite formed by the Persons—the Trinity "as a whole"—is divine. There are (at least) four items, then, that are divine. This much Moreland and Craig affirm. But, given version one of the Second Tenet, the property in virtue of which each of those four things is divine is exactly the same property, and there is no other property by virtue of which the Persons or the Trinity "as a whole" are each divine. So, given version one of the Second Tenet, the rationale Moreland and Craig offered for thinking that there is exactly one God vanishes. True, the Trinity "as a whole" exemplifies the property of being composed of the Persons while no Person exemplifies it. But, given version one of the Second Tenet, the divine nature cannot include that property since there is one and only one complex property whereby a thing can be divine and each of the Persons exemplifies that property but each of them lacks the property of being composed of the Persons. So, given version one of the Second Tenet, there are four items that exemplify the divine nature and hence there are four Gods. If, however, contrary to what I just argued, the divine nature *does* include the property of being composed of the Persons, then none of the Persons is divine since, given version one of the Second Tenet, there is no other nature whereby a thing can be divine. The upshot is that a version of Trinity Monotheism wedded to the first version of the cat analogy either fails to meet the Challenge of Polytheism or fails to solve the Diminished Divinity Problem.

So if Trinity Monotheism is to be guided by the cat analogy, it must be guided by the second version, which, to repeat, is this:

> *The Cat Analogy (2)* Words of the form "*x* is feline" are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully feline: the first property is the property of being a cat and the second

property is the property of being a proper part of a cat.

Of course, the property of being a cat is just the nature of a cat, a natural kind essence if you will. That way of being feline is the heartwarmingly mysterious way of being feline we are familiar with. But what is this allegedly second way of being fully feline, this distinct, second property of felinity? Moreland and Craig tell us that it is a property exemplified by something that is a proper part of a cat, something that is a proper part of a thing that exemplifies the first, familiar property, the property of being a cat.[25] But is there really any such second property of felinity? Let us look into the matter more closely.

**(p.112)** Consider my cat, Socrates. Suppose I assert that

(1) Socrates is feline.

The truth-maker for (1) is the fact that

(TM1) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, and there exists an *x* such that *x*is Socrates, and *x* instantiates C.

Now suppose I assert that

(2) Socrates's skeleton is feline.

If the second version of the cat analogy is true, then the truth-maker for (2) is the fact that

(TM2) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, *and there exists a property C* such that C* is a way of being "fully and unambiguously feline" and C* is not C**, and there exists an *x* such that *x* is Socrates and *x* instantiates C, and there exists a *y* such that *y* is Socrates's skeleton *and* y *instantiates C**, and *y* is a proper part of *x*.

What should we think of this implication of the second version of the cat analogy? I think we should reject it. The reason is this. Suppose I assert that

(3) Socrates's skeleton is a part of a cat.

The truth-maker for (3) is the fact that

(TM3) There exists a property C such that C is the nature of a cat, and there exists an *x* such that*x* is Socrates and *x* instantiates C, and there exists a *y* such that *y* is Socrates's skeleton, and *y* is a proper part of *x*.

But the truth-maker for (3) is the truth-maker for (2), as evidenced by the fact that what I intended to convey by (2) would be just as well conveyed by (3), and vice versa.[26] So the truth-maker for (2) is *not*the truth-maker that is implied by the second version of the cat analogy, with its extra ontological commitment to a second property of felinity (as indicated by the italicized portions of [2]). That is, the second version of the cat analogy is false.

Moreland and Craig wanted us to see that the Persons could be divine without exemplifying the divine nature. Toward this end, they asserted that there are two ways to be divine, *fully* divine. To help us see their meaning, they argued that just as the skeleton of a cat is fully feline without being a cat but rather in virtue of being a proper part of a cat, so each of the Persons is fully divine without being a God but rather in virtue of being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole." I argued that there are two ways to understand what they said about cats; the first way, when applied to the Persons, leads to theological**(p.113)** unacceptabilities, while the second way is simply false. The cat analogy, therefore, fails to help us see how the Persons could be divine without exemplifying the divine nature.[27]

### 3.2. The Diminished Divinity Problem, Again

Suppose that, contrary to what I have just argued, the cat analogy helps us see how the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism could be true. That is, suppose it helps us see how there could be two ways of being fully divine. Then one of the following claims is true:

> *The Second Tenet (1)* There is one and only one property of divinity whereby something can be fully divine, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being the Trinity "as a whole" and the second way is by being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole."
>
> *The Second Tenet (2)* Words of the form "*x* is divine" are ambiguous between the attribution of two distinct properties, each of which is a way of being fully divine: the first property is the property of being the Trinity "as a whole" and the second property is the property of being a proper part of the Trinity.

I argued in section 3.1 that version one of the Second Tenet leads to theological unacceptabilities. I have nothing more to say about it. In the remainder of section 3, I will focus on version two.

In order to keep track of things, let us name the first property referred to in version two, that is, the property of divinity which is exemplified by the Trinity "as a whole," *divinity* $_1$, and let us name the second property, that is, the property of divinity which is exemplified by the parts of the Trinity,*divinity* $_2$. I can best get at my worries about version two of the Second Tenet by reminding us that, according to Moreland and Craig, just as the skeleton of a cat is *fully* feline, so the three Persons are*fully* divine. They are not interested in defending some **(p.114)** watered-down sort of divinity of the Persons, they are interested in defending the real traditional article. As we have seen, however, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons are not fully divine in the traditional way, that is, by exemplifying the divine nature. Rather, according to them, the Persons are fully divine because they are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole." Given version two of the Second Tenet, this explanation of the divinity of the Persons is to be understood explicitly as follows: the reason why the Persons are fully divine is that they are divine$_2$, and the reason they are divine$_2$ is that they are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole." Thus, the reason why the Persons are fully divine is that they are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole."

Now, I take it that one way in which this explanation can fail is if something's being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole" is *logically insufficient* for its being fully divine. A second way it can fail is if it*sheds no light* on how it can be that the Persons are fully divine despite their failure to exemplify the divine nature. With this in mind, consider the following two objections.

First, the part—whole relation is transitive. Thus, if the Father is a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole," then the proper parts of the Father are proper parts of the Trinity "as a whole." Here are three proper parts of the Father: the Father's cognitive faculty, the Father's affective faculty, and the Father's conative faculty. Consider any one them, for example the Father's affective faculty. Although it is a proper part of the Father and hence a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole," and although it is no doubt impressive in many respects, *it*—the Father's affective faculty—fails to exemplify the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and unsurpassable moral goodness; moreover, *it*—the Father's affective faculty—is not worthy of worship. These properties, however, or at least some of them, are partially constitutive of what it is to be fully divine. It is false, therefore, that something's being a proper part of the Trinity "as a whole" is logically sufficient for its being fully divine.

How might Moreland and Craig respond to this objection? Perhaps they will say

that the Father has no proper parts. Their talk of the “rational faculties” of the Persons was never intended to be strictly and literally true; rather, the strict and literal truth of the matter is that the Father has various states, capacities, and powers, and these are not proper parts of the things that have them. One might think that this response fails since, even if the Father has no proper parts, it is nevertheless a consequence of Moreland's and Craig's position that if He did, they would be omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and worship-worthy; however, this counterpossible proposition is false.[28]

Another response is to agree that being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” is logically insufficient for full divinity but add that being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” *and a person* is logically sufficient. Thus, even if the Father had proper parts, they would not have the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, **(p.115)** unsurpassable goodness, and worship-worthiness (unless they were persons, which they would not be). This leads to what I think is a more telling, second objection.

Imagine what it would be like for someone alien to Trinitarianism to hear for the first time that God is composed of three distinct Persons. Our alien might naturally wonder whether the Persons are fully divine and, if so, how that could be, especially after he is told that the Persons do not exemplify the divine nature. If he were answered that the Persons are, indeed, fully divine, because they are proper parts of God, he would rightly remain puzzled. After all, he might say, something's being a proper part of God would not logically suffice for its being fully divine; would it not have to be a proper part that was *a person* as well? “Well, of course!” we might reply; we were taking it for granted that the Persons are persons. Our alien might still remain puzzled, however. After all, he might say, something is a person just in case it has powers of rationality, volition, and so on that are sufficient for personhood, but something's being a proper part of God that possesses any old powers of rationality, and so forth, is not logically sufficient for its being fully divine. Would it not have to possess the *appropriate* powers of rationality, and so forth, those that are logically sufficient for being fully divine? “Well, of course!” we might reply; we were taking it for granted that the Persons were persons who had the appropriate powers of rationality, and so on.

What should our alien make of this answer? Two things, I suggest. First, he should concede that something's *being a proper part of the Trinity “as a whole” that possesses powers of rationality, volition, and so forth, that are logically sufficient for full divinity* is, indeed, logically sufficient for its being fully divine.

Second, he should be unsatisfied with this answer. He asked not only *whether* the Persons are fully divine but also, if so, *how that could be*, given that they do not exemplify the divine nature. The new explanans sheds no light on that question; moreover, the part of it that has to do with being a proper part is explanatorily idle. It is idle because the appeal to being a proper part of God plays no role at all in the new explanans. What is doing the explaining (if anything at all) is the appeal to each Person possessing the relevant powers. The new explanans sheds no light because the explanans that was originally given has been expanded so that it merely asserts that the Persons are fully divine.

The upshot is that, along with the cat analogy itself, Moreland's and Craig's more direct part—whole explanation of how the Persons could be fully divine fails. The Diminished Divinity Problem remains on the table; the Second Tenet of Trinity Monotheism remains shrouded in obscurity, hardly the hallmark of a useful model of the consistency of Trinitarianism.

### 3.3. Are the Persons Individual Substances?

According to Moreland and Craig, although the Persons are persons, they are not individual substances. The mode of being that the Persons enjoy is not as basic or primary or fundamental as the mode of being that God and cats and dogs enjoy.

**(p.116)** One worry about this view of the Persons is best seen by way of a question: if the Persons are not individual substances, then to what category do they belong? Aristotle divided the category of substance into primary or individual substances such as you and me, and secondary substances such as the genus animal and the species humankind. Secondary substances, however, are universals; presumably, Moreland and Craig do not mean to say that each Person is absolutely identical with a universal. So what does that leave us in the way of categories to which the Persons might belong? On the traditional Aristotelian list of the categories, we are left with the nine categories of quantity, quality, a relative, a place, a time, a position, a having, a doing, and a being affected. But none of the Persons is absolutely identical to such “things.” Once you rule out the category of individual substance which is the natural home of persons, the pickings appear to be quite slim. Instead of exploring the options here, I want to focus on the following question: given Moreland's and Craig's own broadly Aristotelian account of what an individual substance is, are the Persons individual substances?

Moreland and Craig introduce their readers to individual substances with these words: “It would seem that properties do, in fact exist and that they are genuine universals. However, reality involves a lot more than properties; there are also individual things like cats and dogs that have properties. Philosophers call such individuals substances…”[29]

To be sure, they note, there have been different conceptions of substance throughout the ages, but, they say, “the most central idea…is one which takes living organisms—individual human beings, butterflies, dogs, oak trees—as the paradigm cases.”[30] And that conception is the one that they denominate “substance,” or, more accurately, “individual substance.” They go on to list what they regard as several features of “the traditional notion of substance,” which they affirm, and which they appear to offer as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being an individual substance.[31]

> (1) An individual substance has properties, but nothing has an individual substance in the sense of having a property.
> (2) The properties and capacities of an individual substance, as well as its proper parts if it has any, form a tight unity. Each individual substance has a nature (essence) by virtue of which it is the kind of thing that it is and without which it would neither exist nor have the basic structure or capacities that it has. If it is a whole composed of parts, its parts are what they are in virtue of playing the role that they play in the whole; apart from the whole, they cease to exist.
> (3) An individual substance remains the same through change.
> (4) An individual substance grows and develops in a law-like fashion in accordance with its nature, and it has in its nature a tendency to realize various potentialities contained therein.
> **(p.117)** (5) An individual substance has something which individuates it from other individual substances that share its nature, something in virtue of which it is a this.

Now, consider the Father. Clearly enough, He has properties, but nothing has Him in the sense of having properties; thus, (1) is satisfied. To be sure, on the view of Moreland and Craig, God *has* the Father in some sense—namely, in the way in which a whole has its proper parts—but it certainly does not follow that God has the property of being the Father. Does the Father have a nature (essence)? Does He belong to a (super)natural kind? Moreland and Craig insist that no Person exemplifies the divine nature since the divine nature includes the

property of being triune and no Person has that property, but they also insist that each Person is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, unsurpassably morally good, and the like. I see no recourse here but to say that, on their view, each Person exemplifies the nature of a *divine person*; this nature distinguishes the Persons from God, that is, the Trinity "as a whole," since God, on their view, is not a person at all. Moreover, it is in virtue of exemplifying the nature of a divine person that the Father is the sort of thing that He is and has the fundamental features and capacities that He has; if He did not exemplify this nature, He would not exist. Finally, being a divine person is a tight unity; all and only divine persons fall into the class of divine persons. Condition (2) is satisfied.

Given the satisfaction of conditions (1) and (2), condition (5) is satisfied. Whatever the details about the "individuating component," the Father is this divine person and not one of *the others*. As for condition (3), the Father remains the same through change in His contingent relations to creatures, for example, their conversion and apostasy. As for contingent nonrelational features: if He has any, then presumably *wanting me to stop cussing so much* and *feeling saddened by my cussing so much* are two that He has these days, properties He lacked before I was ten years old and will lack upon my complete sanctification (I hope).

Condition (4) is the oddball. While organisms, the paradigms of individual substances, may well grow and develop, thereby lawfully realizing their potential as the sorts of things they are, only on views which share too much in common with process theology can we say the same thing of God—which is another way of saying (4) is not a strict necessary condition on being an individual substance. Thus, the Persons meet the conditions for being individual substances just as God does, contrary to the Trinitarian model Moreland and Craig propose.[32]

Why does this matter? Why cannot Moreland and Craig just grant that the Persons are individual substances? Why did they insist otherwise in the first place? So far as I can discern, they insist that the Persons are not individual substances because they want their model to be a clear instance of "the classical formula," namely "three persons in one substance," where "substance" means individual**(p.118)** substance and where the preposition "in" is taken seriously.[33] Perhaps they are thinking that if the Persons are individual substances, then their model posits four individual substances, not just one, as the classical formula requires. If the classical formula does indeed require that there be only one

individual substance in the neighborhood (and I am not saying that it does), then, since by their own accounting the Persons are distinct individual substances, their model is indeed incompatible with the classical formula that they seek to exemplify.

Thus far I have focused on worries about Moreland's and Craig's account of the Persons. I now turn to worries in the region of their treatment of God.

## 4 Worries About the Trinity “As a Whole”

Recall that, according to Moreland and Craig, God is absolutely identical with the Trinity “as a whole,” a composite individual substance that has as proper parts the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Trinity “as a whole” is the only item that exemplifies the divine nature; the Persons do not. Finally, with respect to the Composition Question—the question of how it is that the Persons compose God—Moreland and Craig answer that just as Cerberus is a single physical organism, and Rover, Bowser, and Spike compose him *because* he, that very physical organism, *supports* Rover, Bowser, and Spike, so God is a single immaterial substance, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit compose God *because* God, that very immaterial substance, *supports* the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In section 4.1, I focus on worries about their explanation of how the Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole.” In 4.2, I focus on worries about the fact that the Trinity “as a whole” is not, on their view, a person. In 4.3, I express worries about whether Trinity Monotheism is a version of Monotheism in name only.

### 4.1. Composing and “Supporting”

According to Moreland and Craig, the Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole” because the Trinity “as a whole” *supports* the Persons. To help us see how this can be, they give us two analogies; unfortunately, neither analogy serves its purpose.

The first analogy is the Cerberus analogy. I have two worries about it. First of all, the story of Cerberus is unfit as an analogy. That is because it serves as an analogy only if there is exactly one dog in the story, exactly one item that exemplifies the canine nature, just as there is exactly one God in Trinity Monotheism, exactly one item that exemplifies the divine nature. But it is false that there is exactly one dog in the story. There are exactly three partially overlapping dogs, each of which instantiates the canine nature, and not a single one of them is **(p.119)** Cerberus. Cerberus (if there is such a thing) is an

unnatural composite whose proper parts are three dogs, Rover, Bowser, and Spike; as such, Cerberus—Rover, Bowser, and Spike "as a whole," you might say—is not a dog at all. Think of it this way. Consider a particular pair of Siamese twins that share vital organs below the neck, call them "Jack" and "Jill"; let them compose a whole called "Twinsy." Jack and Jill are distinct humans even if they are partially overlapping. Jack and Jill each exemplify human nature, but Twinsy, whatever it is, does not exemplify human nature. Since there is no salient difference between the (false) claim that Twinsy is a human and the claim that Cerberus is a dog, we should infer that Cerberus is not a dog.

If the story of Cerberus provides an analogy for anything in the vicinity of Social Trinitarianism, it provides an analogy for a Social Trinitarianism according to which there are three exemplifications of the divine nature, that is, a version that implies that there are three Gods, and that the Trinity "as a whole"—if there is such a composite thing—does not exemplify the divine nature at all. This is not Trinity Monotheism; it is the Social Trinitarianism of Richard Swinburne, which is avowedly tritheistic.[34]

One might object that although Jack and Jill are distinct *persons*, there exists exactly one human being in their vicinity, albeit an unusual one with two heads, namely Twinsy. It is because we confuse human beings and persons that we tend to think that Jack and Jill are distinct human beings. The same goes for Cerberus, *mutatis mutandis*. It is because we confuse dogs and "canine" persons that we tend to think that Rover, Bowser, and Spike are distinct dogs. Thus, although Rover, Bowser, and Spike are distinct "canine" persons, there exists exactly one dog in their vicinity, albeit an unusual dog with three heads, namely Cerberus.

What should we make of this objection? I submit that two considerations weigh heavily against it. First, it implies that a single dog can have three distinct, complete, independently functioning brains. This implication seems false since brains individuate mammals; three brains, three mammals. But if there exist three mammals, then it seems there exist three dogs. Second, the objection under discussion implies that if Rover, Bowser, and Spike were surgically separated so that each was supplied with functioning vital organs simultaneously resulting in three viable mammals, three *new dogs* would come into existence by the end of the surgery. But what would have happened to Rover, Bowser, and Spike by surgery's end? Clearly, they did not go out of existence (compare Jack and Jill, *mutatis mutandis*). And none of them is absolutely identical with any of the new dogs since, *ex hypothesi*, none of them were dogs prior to the surgery. Thus,

either (*a*) there exist after the surgery three pairs of*completely* overlapping "canine" persons, one member of each pair being a new dog and the other not being a dog at all, or else (*b*) there exist after the surgery three new dogs none of which is a "canine" person but each of which is an individual substance that exemplifies the canine nature. Alternatively, contrary to what I asserted above, (*c*) there exists **(p.120)** after the surgery just one spatially scattered dog, namely Cerberus, and three surgically separated "canine" persons none of which is a dog: Rover, Bowser, and Spike. None of these options seems nearly as plausible as the simple suggestion that each of Rover, Bowser, and Spike were dogs prior to and after surgery.[35]

My second worry about the Cerberus analogy is that even if Moreland and Craig were right about Cerberus, we have not the foggiest idea what they are saying. That is because even if Cerberus "supports" Rover, Bowser, and Spike, and even if that suffices for them to compose Cerberus, we have no idea what relation Moreland and Craig mean to refer to by the word "support." I will develop this point shortly.

The second analogy makes matters worse. They tell us that, on their view, "God would therefore be one being which supports three persons, just as our individual beings support one person." But what is it, even vaguely, for my "individual being," that is, the individual substance that is absolutely identical with me, to "support one person"? Well, presumably, the "one person" in question is the particular person with which I am absolutely identical. But in that case, by the transitivity of identity, the particular individual substance in question (me) is absolutely identical with the particular person in question (me). It follows by Leibniz's Law that if my "individual being" supports "one person," namely me, then that person, the one I am absolutely identical with, supports my "individual being." The supports relation turns out to be symmetric.

This has disastrous consequences for Trinity Monotheism. Return to the claim that "God…would be one being which supports three persons." If we are to understand this claim "just as" we are to understand the claim that "our individual beings support one another," and if we are to understand the latter in the natural way suggested in the last paragraph, then God, that single composite item, is absolutely identical with the three Persons, which is impossible.

To avoid this disaster, Moreland and Craig must say either that I am not absolutely identical with a particular individual substance, or else that the "one person" in question is not the particular person with whom I am absolutely

identical. Neither option looks especially promising for those who are wedded to the Aristotelian claim that human persons are paradigmatic individual substances.

So, with the slightest bit of pressure, both the Cerberus analogy and the individual human person analogy buckle.

My second general worry in this area is that Moreland's and Craig's use of "supports" has no precedence in the English language. Suppose that there is some *x*, *y*, and *z* such that *x supports y* and *z*. Why should we infer that, *therefore*, *y* and *z compose x*? The foundation of my house supports its walls, floors, roof and so on, but they do not *compose* the foundation. The worry here is intensified by the fact that there is no use of "support" and "compose" in ordinary parlance such that supporting entails composing, as a look at the *Oxford English Dictionary* will reveal. Without, at a minimum, a stipulative definition in terms that we can **(p.121)** understand, we have no idea what they mean by "supports" and hence we have no idea what they mean by the claim that the Persons compose the Trinity "as a whole" because the latter *supports* the former; we have no idea what proposition is expressed, we have no idea what model is proposed for our consideration.[36]

### 4.2. The Divinity of the Trinity "as a Whole"

Moreland and Craig say that each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is absolutely identical with a distinct person, and they say that the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with a particular immaterial mental substance, that is, a soul. In order to avoid saying that there are *four* persons in the vicinity of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity "as a whole"—they say that, although the Trinity "as a whole" is absolutely identical with a particular soul, the Trinity "as a whole" is *not* absolutely identical with a particular person. There is, therefore, at least one soul that is not absolutely identical with a particular person. In that case, the Trinity "as a whole"–that is, God, on their view—is not absolutely identical with a particular person. God, that is, is not a person. Consequently, God is not "equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination." That is not to say that God does not have proper parts that are thus equipped; it is only to say that God itself lacks the equipment. There are several implications we might draw out here. Let me mention three.

First, recall the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning, God created the

heavens and the earth." Creation is an intentional act. An intentional act cannot be performed by anything but a person. God is not a person, say Moreland and Craig. Thus, if they are right, God did not create the heavens and the earth; indeed, He could not have done so. The first sentence of the Bible expresses a necessary falsehood. Not a good start!

**(p.122)** To be sure, a composite can "borrow" properties from its proper parts, under certain conditions. In that case, can we not say that since the Son created the heavens and the earth, God did—given that the Son is a proper part of God? After all, if I am a composite of flesh and blood, then *I* am bleeding if *my arm* is bleeding.

This objection fails. For there can be no "lending" of a property unless the borrower is antecedently the sort of thing that can have it. Unless I am the sort of thing that can bleed—a flesh and blood composite, say—then it is strictly and literally *false* that if my arm is bleeding I am bleeding. For example, if I am absolutely identical with an immaterial mental substance, then it is just plain false that I am bleeding if my arm is bleeding. Immaterial things are not the sorts of things that can bleed. Obviously, an immaterial thing might *possess* something— say, a body made of flesh and blood—such that if a part of it bleeds then it too bleeds. But *x*'s possessing a *y* which is such that if a part of *y* is F then *y* is F no more implies that *x* is F than does my possessing a tire whose tube can be inflated to 3,000psi implies that I can be inflated to 3,000psi. Equally obviously, we all use the words "I am bleeding" in certain circumstances, and we do so without a thought as to whether we are the sorts of things that can bleed. But this fact about our usage no more implies that we express truths when we use "I am bleeding" than our use of "The sun moved behind the trees" implies that we express a truth when we use it.

The upshot is that, as in banking, borrowing and lending in ontology have their conditions and limits. Unless God is antecedently the sort of thing that can act intentionally—that is, unless God is a person—God cannot borrow the property of creating the heavens and the earth from the Son. God cannot create. Of course, creation of the heavens and the earth is only one act attributed to God in the biblical texts. All other acts attributed to God will likewise turn out to be, strictly and literally, false.

Second, Judeo-Christian anthropology will have to be remade. No other text is more central to an understanding of what we are than this: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him." While no image has all

of the features of that of which it is an image, the tradition has it that a human being is made in the image of God insofar as he or she "is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination," to borrow an apt description from Moreland and Craig. Unfortunately, this is the description of a *person*, which they say God is not. In what respects, then, are we made in the image of an individual substance that is void of all personal attributes?

Third, recall that, according to Moreland and Craig, the Persons do not exemplify the divine nature, only the Trinity "as a whole" enjoys that privilege. Thus, on their view, the Trinity "as a whole" at once exemplifies the divine nature and yet *fails* to be a person. This is not a high view of the divine nature, I take it; indeed, it is abysmally low. To see just how low it is, consider what sorts of properties theists typically associate with the divine nature that cannot be exemplified by something that fails to be a self-reflective agent capable of **(p.123)** self-determination. Without going into the details, I take it that the list includes noteworthy members such as omnipotence, omniscience, unsurpassable moral goodness, and worship-worthiness.[37]

Moreland and Craig are not as forthcoming about this implication as they ought to be. On the only occasion they begin to address it, they tell us that "when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent…." That is a good start. But look at how they continue the sentence: "rather, God has these properties because the persons do."[38] God is not a person or agent, yet God is omnipotent, omniscient, and the like. What! If God is not a person or agent, then God does not know anything, cannot act, cannot choose, cannot be morally good, cannot be worthy of worship. This is the God of Moreland's and Craig's Trinity Monotheism.[39]

### 4.3. Trinity "Monotheism" and Monotheism

Monotheists assert that there exists exactly one God. Moreland and Craig say that they assert *the same thing*. This is not the case, however. What they affirm when they use the words "there exists exactly one God" is not the same thing that monotheists affirm when they use those words.

When monotheists assert that there exists exactly one God, they affirm the existence of something of a certain sort, *a* God; they affirm the existence of something that belongs to a certain supernatural kind if you will, namely divinity. There exists exactly one of *those* things, they say; not many. The claim

that there exists exactly one God cannot be understood unless the word “God” in that claim is a class or kind term and not a proper name. That is not to say that there is no use of “God” as a proper name; obviously, there is. It is only to say that when monotheists claim that there exists exactly one God, they are contrasting “one” with “many” and there is no grammatical sense to be made of “one God” in contrast with “many Gods” if “God” is being used as a proper name in both cases. Proper names do not take the plural; class terms do. So Monotheism is a thesis about Gods and the thesis is this: there is one and only one of them.

The point I want to make here is not merely a point of grammar; it is a point of history. There are no monotheists unless traditional Jews are monotheists, and when they assert that there exists exactly one God, they affirm that there exists a **(p.124)** certain number of Gods and the number is one. Moreover, traditional Christians agree with traditional Jews on this score. After all, when the early Christians were accused by their Jewish contemporaries of being polytheists, they responded by insisting that, *like their accusers*, they too affirmed that there exists exactly one God. They *agreed* with them. What they agreed to was what the Jews themselves believed, that there exists a certain number of Gods, and that that number is *one*. It is not an historical accident that the Athanasian Creed (ca. AD 500) affirms that “they are not three Gods, but one God” and that the Creeds of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) begin with the words, “We believe in one God.”

The upshot here is that academic Trinitarians cannot mean whatever they like when they insist that they are monotheists. Grammar and history do not permit it, and this point applies to Trinity Monotheism as well, particularly the version of Trinity Monotheism put forward by Moreland and Craig.

Despite their good intentions, their version of Trinity Monotheism is not a version of Monotheism; the tenets of their position do not permit it. Monotheists disagree with them over what properties are included in the nature of a God. Moreland and Craig insist that the divine nature includes the property of being triune and that the divine nature lacks the property of being a person in the minimal sense. Monotheists insist that the divine nature does not include the property of being triune and they insist that the divine nature does include the property of being worthy of worship, which implies being a person in the minimal sense. Monotheists as diverse as Christians and Jews (not to mention Muslims)*agree* that there exists exactly one God, one instance of that supernatural sort of thing, *a* God. If nothing could be a God unless the nature it

exemplified included the property of being triune and lacked the property of being a person, then Christians and Jews would not be in agreement on this score. But they are. So, according to Monotheism, something can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being triune and nothing can be a God without exemplifying a nature that includes the property of being a person. Either way, Moreland and Craig offer us a version of Trinity Monotheism that is *not* a version of Monotheism.[40]

## (p.125) 5. Conclusion

We began with a simple argument: the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are inconsistent with each other. By way of response, Moreland and Craig suggested that we read the Sameness Claim as implying the Property Identity Claim, not the Person Identity Claim. That response, however, led to the Challenge of Polytheism, to which they responded by invoking their Trinity Monotheism. Unfortunately, their Trinity Monotheism—both on the periphery and at the core—has intolerable consequences for Trinitarianism, or so I have argued. If I am right, then the Challenge of Polytheism remains on the table for Trinity Monotheism; at any rate, I cannot see how Moreland's and Craig's version of Trinity Monotheism has removed it.[41]

Notes:

(1) In what follows, I will assume that the relation of sameness in question is absolute identity. My assumption should not be mistaken for endorsement, however. Peter van Inwagen has constructed a logic of relative identity, and in that logic the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are consistent both with themselves and a host of other orthodox Trinitarian and incarnational claims. See his “And Yet They are not Three Gods but One God,” and “Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person,” in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1995). Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea have defined a relation of numerical sameness with neither absolute nor relative identity, and it, for all I know, might be the relation in virtue of which the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim are compatible. See their “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* [this vol., Ch. 14].

(2) My first interaction with the Trinitarianism of Moreland and Craig was through Craig's “Toward a Tenable Social Trinitarianism,” presented at the Seventy-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Society for the Philosophy of Religion, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, March 2003, which I commented on at that

meeting. Since then, I learned that the paper was excerpted from chapter 29, in their enormous,coauthored *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 575–96 [see Ch. 5 of this volume].

(3) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590–1 [this vol., p. 96].

(4) Brian Leftow coined the term. See “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis; Daniel Kendall, SJ; Gerald O’Collins, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–49 [this vol., Ch. 4].

(5) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590 [this vol., pp. 95–96].

(6) The inference this sentence contains is fallacious. The individual who is God can have a property essentially even if that property isnot partly constitutive ofthe divine nature. Compare: mycat, Socrates, can have a property essentially even if that property is not partially constitutive of the feline nature.

(7) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591 [this vol., p. 96].

(8) Ibid.

(9) Ibid., 593.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid., 593–4 [this vol., p. 99]. The reference to chapter 11 is a reference to chapter 11 of their book.

(13) Ibid., 215 ff.

(14) Ibid., 232. Whether Moreland and Craig think that there are no immaterial individual substances other than souls is none of my concern here.

(15) Direct awareness through introspection of one's self, they write, “shows that a person is not identical to his or her body in whole or in part or to one's experiences, but rather is the thing that has them. In short, one is a mental substance,” that is, a soul (239); “[t]he clearest and most obvious case of a substance is in our own self-acquaintance” (300). Part 3 of *Philosophical Foundations* is peppered with the implication that each human soul we are

acquainted with is–in the sense of absolute identity– a human person.

(16) This seems to be implied by the sentence, “[w]e naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons.” Of course, by their lights, this “natural equation” is *false*. We make the equation because each *human* soul we are familiar with is absolutely identical with a particular person, but the universal equation of souls and persons turns out to be a hasty generalization. In particular, the equation is false since, on their view, the Father is absolutely identical with a particular person but not with a particular individual substance. Likewise for the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(17) Cf. Peter van Inwagen, “Not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person,” and Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 263–5.

(18) Argument: the conjunction of

> ((1)) God is absolutely identical with the three Persons
> and
> ((2)) The Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with God,
> which is the First Tenet, entails by the transitivity of absolute identity that
> ((3)) The Trinity “as a whole” is absolutely identical with the three Persons.
> But recall the composition claim:
> ((4)) The three Persons compose the Trinity “as a whole.”
> Using the term “the *p*s” as a plural variable which collectively refers to the *p*s and not to any object which has the *p*s as its parts or members,
> ((5)) Necessarily, for any *p*s and for any thing *x*, if the ps compose *x*, then *x* is not absolutely identical with the *p*s.
> The denial of (3) follows from (4) and (5).

(19) Moreland and Craig think that there is an “is” of composition, as exhibited in sentences like “Socrates is flesh and bone.” See Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 174–5. Whether there is an “is” of composition or not, the fact that they *think* there is adds some reason to suppose that they mean to say that God *is composed* of the Persons when they say that God is the Persons.

(20) Moreland and Craig, Philosophical Foundations, 238–43. They have in mind properties such as a direct awareness of the self, the irreducibility of the first-person perspective, the capacity to retain identity through change, freedom, and the unity of consciousness. My point is that even if these properties can only

be had by immaterial *persons*, it does not follow that they can only be had by immaterial *individual substances*–provided, of course, that there can be immaterial persons that are not immaterial individual substances, which, according to them, there can.

(21) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 279–80.

(22) Ibid., 594.

(23) Ibid., 610.

(24) I owe this qualification to Bill Craig. In what follows, I will leave it tacit. We might not be satisfied with the qualification. After all, as Mike Rea pointed out to me, it is not at all clear what it is for a proper part to be *distinctive* of a species.

(25) What if a cat dies and the soft tissue of its corpse rots, dries, and blows away, but its skeleton remains pretty much intact. Is the skeleton feline? It seems so, but it is not if Moreland and Craig are correct; they say a cat's DNA and skeleton are feline because "they *are* parts of a cat" (my emphasis, note the tense), and in this case, the skeleton is no longer a proper part of a cat, even though it once was. Moreland and Craig can say (if they would like; some Aristotelian substance theorists do not) that a skeleton is feline just in case it is, *or was*, a proper part of a cat. Another case: can God create a feline skeleton *ex nihilo*, without it ever being a proper part of a cat? If so, we need to fiddle with their account some more. Consider it done, if you think it needs doing. For the sake of expository simplicity, I am going to stick with the simple present tense version in what follows.

(26) As you try to think of counterexamples to this premise, keep in mind that I am assuming the simple present tense version of Moreland's and Craig's claim that *a cat's DNA and skeleton are fully and unambiguously feline because "they are parts of a cat.*" See the previous note. So construct your counterexamples in accordance with that charitable assumption.

(27) Frances Howard-Snyder insists that there is a third version of the cat analogy lurking here. Recall that, strictly speaking, a whole is a part of itself. To be sure, it is not a *proper* part of itself, but it is, as they say, an *improper* part of itself. A cat, therefore, is a part–an improper part–of a cat. Of course, Socrates's skeleton is also a part of a cat, namely Socrates himself. So Socrates and his skeleton share a certain feature: being a part of a cat. Thus, we have

> *The Cat Analogy (3)* There is one and only one property of felinity whereby something can be fully feline, namely being a part of a cat, but there are two distinct ways to exemplify it: the first way is by being a proper part of a cat and the second way is by being an improper part of a cat.

Dale Tuggy insists that there is a fourth version of the cat analogy:

> *The Cat Analogy (4)* There is one and only one way to be feline, namely by exemplifying the nature of a cat; but "feline" is predicable of items that are not feline, e.g., certain proper parts of cats.

Version three inherits some of the difficulties mentioned in the text. Version four implies that the Persons are not divine even if "divinity" is predicable of them.

I am indebted to Jeff Jordan for putting me onto this worry about the cat analogy, and to Frances Howard-Snyder and Hud Hudson for helping me to work it out properly.

(28) I take it that counterpossibles can, in principle, be false. Depending on how sympathetic you are to false counterpossibles, you will find this objection convincing. Thanks to Mike Rea for helping me to see how to put this point.

(29) [Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*,] 214.

(30) Ibid.

(31) Ibid., 215–19.

(32) If (4) is a strict necessary condition and God satisfies it, then I see no reason why each of the Persons does not also.

(33) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 594.

(34) Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 8.

(35) Thanks to Joshua Spencer and Hud Hudson for making me alive to worries about Cerberus.

(36) I sometimes worry that with all this talk of "supporting," Moreland and Craig mean to endorse a Lockean rather than an Aristotelian theory of substance. According to Locke, and in agreement with Aristotle, properties cannot subsist on their own; there are no free-floating properties. A substance, says Locke, is

that which underlies or supports properties. It is that in which properties inhere. Perhaps Moreland and Craig mean to suggest that God is the substance—the Lockean bare substratum—that supports the Persons, those discrete sets of powers sufficient for personhood. If so, then we have been misled by the talk about the Persons *composing* God, since a Lockean bare substratum cannot be a composite. Indeed, it is not clear what a Lockean *bare* substratum is; he called it a "something I know not what." To make matters worse, Locke's theory implies that an individual substance is something that, in itself, has no properties whatsoever; that is why it is called a bare substratum. Unfortunately, that is hardly intelligible. But, even if it were, it would not be of use to Moreland and Craig. They want to say God is absolutely identical with a particular immaterial substance and that God exemplifies the divine nature; but, if the substance in question is a Lockean bare substratum, then God, in itself, has no properties, and hence no essential properties; as such, it does not exemplify any nature, divine or otherwise. Like all theists, Trinitarians will naturally resist this suggestion.

(37) An anonymous referee asserted that *every* model of the Trinity must say that God is not a person. So far as I can see, this assertion does little more than express the referee's myopic view of the options, not to mention his or her disregard for the plain sense of Scripture and tradition.

(38) Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 591 [this vol., p. 96].

(39) Note the fallacy in the text at page 591: "the whole can have a property because some part has it.*Thus*, when we ascribe omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not making the Trinity a fourth person or agent; rather, God has these properties because the persons do" (emphasis added). The inference is valid only if God is the sort of thing that antecedently can have the properties that God's proper parts have, and the denial of personhood and agency to God is exactly that which undercuts the validity of the inference from the Persons having maximal power and knowledge to God having those features.

(40) It is important to see that nothing I have said here implies that the one and only thing that in fact exemplifies the divine nature lacks the essential property of *being triune*. Something can have an essential property and yet not have it in virtue of being the kind of thing that it is. Perhaps that is the case with the Christian God; indeed, it had better be if Christians are to be Monotheists.

The argument here applies with equal force to other attempts by Social Trinitarians to "cling to respectability as monotheists," e.g., Cornelius Plantinga,

Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Plantinga offers “three ways” in which Social Trinitarians can affirm that there exists exactly one God: (1) There exists exactly one God if “God” isused as “the peculiar designator of the Father,” as the one and only “font of divinity”; (2) there exists exactly one God if “God” is the proper name of “a set of excellent properties severally necessary and jointly sufficient for their possessor to be divine”; and (3) there exists exactly one God if “God” “is used as a designator of the…one divine family or monarchy or community, namely, the Holy Trinity itself.”

(41) Thanks to Ben Bradley, William Lane Craig, Frances Howard-Snyder, Hud Hudson, Jeff Jordan, William Kilborn, Shieva Kleinschmidt, Christian Lee, Brain Leftow, Michael Rea, Joshua Spencer, Dale Tuggy, and an anonymous referee for comments on predecessors of this paper.

# Another Glance at Trinity Monotheism

**William Lane Craig**

The strength of our proposal lies in the fact that it doesn’t rest content with a merely formulaic understanding of the Trinity. Rather we try to offer a model which actually shows how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be three persons in one substance. The model itself is disarmingly simple and prima facie coherent. Why could not a soul be so richly endowed as to possess three sets of cognitive faculties sufficient for personhood, even as our souls possess one such set? I see no apparent reason it could not, nor does Howard-Snyder offer one. So the only remaining question is whether this proposal is theologically acceptable. If Howard-Snyder's misgivings expressed in his section 4 prove not too serious, then his concerns about parthood raised in section 3, while philosophically interesting, will not be vital to the model's success. I have elsewhere responded at length to Howard-Snyder's criticisms.[1] Here space permits only a few comments on his principal objections.

## Theological Objections (Section 4)

In section 4.1 Howard-Snyder criticizes, not the model, but the analogy used as a springboard to arrive at the model. In my longer reply I show that his objections are misconceived, but the more fundamental point is that criticism of an analogy employed in the quest of a solution does nothing to show the inadequacy of the final solution.

In section 4.2 Howard-Snyder turns to a discussion of the model itself. He observes that on the model God "is not a person," but he cashes this out tendentiously as God's lacking the cognitive equipment sufficient for being "a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination." This is very misleading, as though God were not on our view a personal being. But on our view God has the cognitive equipment sufficient for personhood three times over and so is **(p.127)** tri-personal. Thus, there's nothing objectionable in the implication of our view that God is not a (single) person. That's part and parcel of Trinitarian orthodoxy.

In section 4.3, Howard-Snyder alleges that our view is not monotheistic. He points out that if we define the divine nature so as to include the property of being triune, we exclude Jews as monotheists. This objection fails to appreciate that there can be dictionary definitions of "God" which are sufficient for ordinary usage without listing all the properties belonging to the generic divine nature. Moreover, Howard-Snyder's claim that all monotheists concur that God is a person confuses unitarianism with monotheism. Monotheists concur that God is personal, not that He is a person.

## Mereological Objections (Section 3)

What Howard-Snyder calls the “Diminished Divinity Problem” arises as a result of Leftow's charge that if the Trinitarian persons do not instantiate the divine nature, then they enjoy at best a sort of diminished divinity. We replied that Leftow's objection presupposed that there is but one way to be divine, which begs the question against Trinity Monotheism. That reply suffices to defeat the objection; but in search of a positive account we explored the question, “In virtue of what are the persons of the Trinity divine?” We consider the analogy of felinity. There's more than one way to be feline, for a cat's DNA or skeleton is feline, though neither is an instance of the feline nature, plausibly because they are parts of a cat.

Howard-Snyder seems to agree that there's more than one way to be feline. His principal worry concerns the *meaning* of the words “there are two ways of being feline.” He provides two alternative ways of understanding what is meant by these words. Now it must be immediately said that what Howard-Snyder offers is not at all the *meaning* of these words but rather competing *metaphysical analyses* in terms of properties, exemplification, predicates, truth-makers, proper and improper parts, and so on. None of these has anything at all to do with the *meaning* of the words in question, which are so simple that a child could understand them. They mean something like “There's more than one way of being cat-like.” This is important because the Trinity Monotheist may not have any settled views on a metaphysical analysis while holding that the sentence is meaningful and true and that he can explain why it is true. If I were called upon to give an analysis of the claim in question, I should commit myself metaphysically to no more than

> F. “Being feline” is truly predicable of any entity *x* if *x* either is a cat or is a distinctive part of a cat.

I’m simply not prepared to take on all the metaphysical baggage that Howard-Snyder's analyses would foist upon us.

**(p.128)** For the sake of argument, however, let's see whether Howard-Snyder's two analyses adequately handle the questions: (i) Why can a cat's skeleton or DNA be truly said to be feline, and (ii) Can the divinity of the persons of the Trinity be analogously explained? Howard-Snyder acknowledges that his first analysis in terms of a single property *felinity* being exemplified in two different ways enables us to give an adequate answer to question (i), so let's leave it aside

for now and consider his second analysis with respect to (i). According to this analysis, "*x* is feline" may be used to attribute either of two properties. But Howard-Snyder objects to there being a second property of felinity. For the truth-maker for

3. Howard-Snyder's cat Socrates' skeleton is part of a cat.

is also the truth-maker for

2. Socrates' skeleton is feline.

But on Howard-Snyder's second analysis, the truth-maker for (2) ought to be a different, more complex fact. Therefore, (2) doesn't mean what the second analysis says that it means.

This objection to the second analysis gratuitously assumes that there are such things as truth-makers. The Trinity Monotheist is not obliged to align himself with that minority of philosophers who believe in truth-makers.[2] Moreover, if there are truth-makers, why think that they are "facts" in this case? Why not say that the truth-maker of (2) and (3) as well as

1. Socrates is feline.

is just Socrates himself, the real, live cat? Moreover, Howard-Snyder seems to assume that truth-making is closed under logical implication, so that if (3) implies (2), what makes (3) true also makes (2) true. But that assumption is false. For example, "Socrates has retractable claws" implies that "Grass is green," since both are true, but they obviously have diffrent truth-makers. Perhaps he thinks that (2) and (3) are synonymous. But that is clearly wrong, since something can be feline without being part of a cat. Finally, even if the truth-maker of (3) did serve to make (2) true, that is inconsequential, since propositions can have multiple truth-makers. So the elaborate objection to the second analysis (misguided as it is) is unconvincing.

Now what about question (ii) concerning the applicability of the analogy to the problem of the Trinity? According to the first analysis there will be one property of divinity which both the Trinity and the persons exemplify. Howard-Snyder observes that at least four items have this property; but then our rationale for thinking that there is exactly one God vanishes. This reprise of Leftow's objection is as question-begging as the original. It assumes that the only way of being divine is to exemplify the divine nature. This is precisely what Trinity

Monotheism denies. On the analogy with (F) we may affirm

> **(p.129)** G. “Being divine” is truly predicable of any entity *x* if *x* either is a God or is a distinctive part of a God.

The question then remains whether on our model the persons should be considered to be distinctive parts of God.

In section 3.2, Howard-Snyder presses his critique based upon his second analysis, according to which there are two distinct properties ascribed by the ambiguous predicate “is divine.” Since we reject that analysis, this section of his paper is irrelevant to our model. Still, since interesting questions arise in this section, let's pursue the discussion. Here we encounter the very difficult question of whether the persons of the Trinity are parts of God. I think our final model leaves this an open question. Whether or not they qualify on our model as parts, I think the persons on our model are indisputably divine, for they are God's persons and are omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, worthy of worship, and so forth. Neither is their being parts crucial to their not being three Gods, for they are clearly not three separate beings on the model, there being only one soul endowed with three sets of cognitive faculties. The model is what it is regardless of how we decide the mereological question.

In his book *Parts* Peter Simons catalogues the various possibilities of composition, analyzing composites in terms of individuals, masses, and collections.[3] We may rule out immediately as inappropriate for the Trinity any composites involving masses, since neither the Trinity nor the persons can be construed as masses. That leaves either an individual composed of individuals or a collection composed of individuals. Is either of these appropriate?

Consider a collection made up of individuals. The Trinity has obvious affinities to a group. The Trinity seems to be a plurality, not an individual, which is made up of the three divine persons. We naturally speak of the persons as members of the Trinity, which is the language associated with groups and classes. Regarding the Trinity as a group would dissolve Howard-Snyder's objection that since parthood is transitive the parts of the Father would be parts of the Trinity, for parthood is not transitive across types of composition: John is part of the team, but John's nose is not part of the team. As members of the Trinity, the divine persons are uniquely worthy of worship.

If we regard the Trinity as a group, however, the claim of Trinity Monotheism that the Trinity is identical with God will have to be given up. For God is clearly

an individual substance and, hence, an individual. The Trinity would be simply the collection of the divine persons, which is not itself an individual or a substance. Our final model of God as an immaterial substance enjoying three centers of self-consciousness would remain unaffected. One would merely not identify the Trinity with that substance, nor would it follow that the persons are parts of God in virtue of being parts of the Trinity.

Suppose instead that we regard the Trinity as an individual composed of individuals. Since that individual is naturally to be identified with God, we **(p.130)** thereby stick with Trinity Monotheism. The Trinity just is the tri-personal spiritual substance described in our model. The individuals composing this being are the three persons of the Trinity. The central question which remains for this view is the question raised by Howard-Snyder in section 3.3: are the persons individual substances?

The answer to that question will depend on whether one thinks that inseparable parts of a substance are themselves substances. Such parts are individuals, but it's not clear that they are substances. They seem to lack the “stand alone” quality that something must have in order to be a substance. If they are not substances, they may still have, however, enough integrity to have natures. A hand, for example, seems to have certain essential properties, such as having digits and an opposable thumb. The persons of the Trinity could similarly share a certain nature, just as my hands do, without being substances in their own right. That nature would include all the great-making properties that make them worthy of worship. In such a case we should have three parts composing one substance, as in traditional Trinitarian formulas.

On the other hand, suppose we say that inseparable parts can count as substances in their own right. In that case the persons of the Trinity would doubtless count as individuals who are substances. They would again share the nature of a divine person. But never mind: as inseparable parts they are still three persons in one substance. They are no more instances of the nature of that unique substance than my hands are instances of the human nature. So the unity of God is preserved along with the divinity of the persons. Hence, nothing of significance hangs on whether we regard a substance's inseparable parts as substances. The crucial fact is that these individuals compose one unique, indivisible individual which is a substance.

Notes:

(1) “Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder,” *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 101–13.

(2) For a trenchant critique of truth-maker theory see Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

(3) Peter Simons, *Parts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 232.

# Fully Social Trinitarianism

**Carl Mosser**

Social Trinitarianism (ST) finds widespread support among Christian theologians and philosophers. According to one critic, Social Trinitarianism is so fashionable that it has practically become the new orthodoxy in some quarters.[1] It is not difficult to see why. Systematic theologians promote ST as an alternative to the austere modalism supposedly latent in the theologies of Augustine, Aquinas and the two Karls (Rahner and Barth). They find in ST an exciting and eminently practical resource for Christian reflection on culture, ecclesiology, politics, gender, love, family, and creation. Social Trinitarianism represents a bold attempt to rebut Kant's assertion that "the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has*no practical relevance at all*, even if we think we understand it."[2] Christian philosophers who may be less concerned about the practicality of doctrine also find ST very attractive. They embrace the model because it supplies resources to rebut charges against the logical coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The last thirty years have seen a proliferation of theologies that claim the Social Trinitarian moniker. This makes it difficult to generalize about ST in a manner that all proponents would accept. The closest thing to a set of common family traits are (1) appeal for precedent to a simple story about the development of trinitarian theologies in the Greek East and Latin West, (2) insistence that the members of the Trinity are persons in the "full, modern" sense who relate to one another in community, (3) a particular way of substantiating the claim about personhood from scripture, and (4) an operative definition of monotheism that is more flexible than the tradition has usually employed.

The first part of this essay will describe the first three of these traits. Particular attention will be given to identifying what early Social Trinitarians meant when they referred to full, modern personhood. Following this will be an exposition illustrating the incommensurable ways in which this commitment is currently **(p.132)** understood by contemporary Social Trinitarians. The intent is to simultaneously clarify the original commitment that led to some trinitarian theologies being labeled *social* models and to encourage contemporary advocates to clarify the parameters of Social Trinitarianism. The second part of the essay returns to the same three family traits in a more critical mode. There I will highlight serious challenges that have been mounted against the ST story. I

will then suggest that consistent application of the alleged insights that gave rise to ST and the biblical hermeneutic employed to substantiate it each lead to a "trinitarianism" that is more fully social than most people would deem permissible within the parameters of Christian confession. I will conclude by offering an example of a theology that does this. The main point of this essay is to show that a great deal of work needs to be done still before Social Trinitarianism will constitute a mature, viable option within Christian theology.

## Part 1: Description And Exposition

### The Social Trinitarian Narrative

Social Trinitarianism is usually introduced with a story about the differences between Eastern and Western approaches to the Trinity. The narrative begins by asserting that two basic and quite different models of the Trinity are represented in late patristic theology. The Western model exemplified by Augustine begins with God's oneness defined in terms of numeric identity, defines the divine essence substantively, and is fond of single-person psychological analogies. It is unable to attribute full personhood to the trinitarian members because commitment to divine simplicity functions as a theological straightjacket. Adherents are consequently inclined to refer to the trinitarian members as “modes of being” or “divine subsistences” distinguished within the immanent Trinity only by oppositions of relation (i.e. the difference between begetting, being begotten, and proceeding). Differences between the persons observed in the economy of redemption are not read back into the immanent Trinity. The Eastern model exemplified by the Cappadocian Fathers begins with God's threeness, defines the divine essence generically, and is fond of multi-person social analogies of the Trinity. It favors a dynamic, relational, and complex understanding of the divine being stemming from the full personhood it ascribes to the trinitarian members. The personal relations and interaction observed in the economy of redemption are taken to reflect the essentially social and dynamic nature of the immanent Trinity. Social Trinitarianism is presented as a modern development of the ancient Eastern model.

The purpose of the ST narrative is fourfold. First, it justifies the methodology of the ST project. The story attributes to the Eastern and Western models different methodological starting points that can be replicated in the contemporary discussion. The Western approach begins with the unity of God and attempts **(p.133)** to explain trinitarian plurality; the Eastern and ST approach begins with the threeness of the persons and attempts to explain their unity.[3] The use of social analogies by the Cappadocians similarly establishes the appropriateness of reasoning about the nature of the Godhead from human society. Secondly, the narrative is designed to rebut the lurking charge of novelty by supplying precedent for key theological planks on which the social model is built. Most notable among these are the generic interpretation of *homoousias* in the Nicene Creed and ascription of full personhood to the trinitarian members. Thirdly, the story associates the Cappadocians with modern ST in hope that similarities with

their teachings will allow for the impeccable trinitarian orthodoxy of the former to be extended to the latter.[4] Lastly, the narrative highlights the perceived theological superiority of ST by insinuating that the Western model runs the more serious risk of heterodoxy. The story suggests that commitment to non-biblical doctrines (especially divine simplicity) pushed Western theology too far in the direction of modalism and caused the tradition to ignore straightforward biblical evidence for the full personhood of the trinitarian members. Or so we are told.

## The Social Trinitarian Thesis

Framed by the contours of this story, Social Trinitarianism is presented as an explanation of divine unity that prioritizes threeness over numerical identity of substance. I suggest that its core commitment is instead a thesis about the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from which a particular notion of unity is deduced. The thesis is this: within the immanent Trinity the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are persons in the "full, modern" sense of the term. They are not mere subsistences or modes of being. Each is a distinct agent who possesses all the necessary attributes of divinity as well as his own center of consciousness, thought, will, and love. The three interact with and respond to one another as distinct selves. From this it follows that their unity is irreducibly social in nature. We can see this more clearly if we observe the shape of the basic argument.

(1) Inter-personal unity is irreducibly social in nature. (Definition)
(2) The members of the Trinity are persons in the full, modern sense.
(3) Therefore, the unity of the Trinity is genuinely social in nature.

**(p.134)** To say that the Trinity is a social unity immediately raises the specter of tritheism. Why refer to one God rather than three? To avoid tritheism, most Social Trinitarians reinforce the description of divine unity with the doctrine of perichoresis:

(4) The divine persons interpenetrate, co-inhere, and mutually indwell one another in perichoresis.

According to perichoresis, the divine persons know and love one another in an unreserved, uninhibited, unmediated, and utterly unselfish manner. They therefore experience a depth of communion far beyond anything known in human society that results in a profound harmony of thought, purpose, and will. Power is exercised by the individual persons only with the consent and co-operation of the other two. On these grounds most Social Trinitarians assert

warrant for referring to the perichoretically-related divine persons as one God.[5]

What does it mean to say that the members of the Trinity are persons in the “full, modern sense”? This terminology is most directly derived from the work of Leonard Hodgson. Hodgson may not have been the first modern Social Trinitarian, but it was his work that garnered serious attention to the position and which caused its initial popularity. According to Hodgson, ascribing to the members of the Godhead full personality in the modern sense is to say that they are “intelligent, purposive centres of consciousness.”[6] But this on its own does not constitute the fullness of the modern conception of personhood. There are two additional elements of the concept that led people to label positions like Hodgson's *social* doctrines of the Trinity. The first is the idea that persons are constituted by their social relations. The second is the thesis that true unity is always unity-in-multiplicity. This threefold concept of the person was appropriated from the work of early twentieth-century psychologists and sociologists, hence the moniker *Social* Trinitarianism.

When Hodgson begins his explanation of divine unity he expresses indebtedness to the work of John Laird for the ideas that he utilizes.[7] It quickly becomes clear that the heart of this explanation is Laird's understanding of persons. Laird rejects the understanding of the self upon which earlier psychologists built their theories, namely the self as an autonomous individual. This is a profound mistake, says Laird, because an individual “is as dependent on society as he is **(p.135)** on bread.”[8] Indeed, “the self requires society.”[9] The individual is a complete self, a unity, only by virtue of his relations with other selves. Laird insists that this unity-in-multiplicity is the only kind of unity persons can experience. Hence, “There is no unity worth the name that does not contain multiplicity.”[10]

Laird's work would be forgotten but the key psychological and sociological ideas upon which STwas built would continue to be developed and popularized. Most notable in this regard are the published Gifford Lectures of John MacMurray.[11] MacMurray's “relational ontology” has had an unusually large influence on the assumptions and categories employed by many theologians of the last two generations. These kinds of ideas have also permeated modern sociology. For example, Werner Stark begins his influential sociology text as follows:

> However we may define society in general; whatever else it may or may not be: one thing is certain, namely that each and every social formation is at

> the same time a multiplicity and a unity. We cannot speak of a society unless there are before us several human beings, and unless the lives of these human beings are in some way interconnected and interrelated, i.e. constitute a unity of some kind.[12]

Whether derived from Laird, MacMurray, or a general course in sociology, these sorts of claims supplied early Social Trinitarians with a solution to the conundrums generated by the belief that God is simultaneously three persons and one being. If "God is one" (James 2:19; cf. Deut. 6:4) and all true unity necessarily includes multiplicity, then the Triune God is a unity of interconnected and interrelated selves-in-society. They also stand behind Moltmann's axiom: "Without the social relation there can be no personality."[13] (Conversely, without full personhood there can be no genuine social relation.) The ongoing influence of these insights can be seen in Colin Gunton's more recent assertion: "Personal beings are social beings, so that of both God and man it must be said that they have their being in their personal relatedness: their free relation-in-otherness."[14]

## Univocity, Analogy, and the Equivocal Social Trinity

So far the Social Trinitarian proposal seems straightforward. This illusion dissipates once we observe that contemporary proponents of ST disagree about whether the terms *person* and *social* in (2) and (3) above refer to the Trinity in **(p.136)** a univocal, equivocal, or analogical manner. The general tendency in all varieties of ST is to employ them as univocal terms[15] but some Social Trinitarians ultimately back away from this. Disagreements also touch on the issue of whether these terms refer univocally between the economic Trinity and immanent Trinity. In much ST literature there is a clear move toward abandoning the economic/immanent distinction altogether. One must question the appropriateness of stamping the same doctrinal brand name on theologies that disagree on such fundamental issues.

According to the widely endorsed expositions of ST found in the writings of Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Thomas Thompson, the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct centers of consciousness and thereby persons "in some full sense of that term," much as Paul and Apollos are persons in a full sense of the term.[16] This means that ST ascribes "personhood to the trinitarian members severally, but does this in its strongest, most eminent and unimpaired sense. It is this option that constitutes a social understanding of the Trinity."[17] Accordingly, God is not

conceived of “as three persons in some weak, highly equivocal sense, whose individuation is finally dubious…rather, God is conceived of quite unequivocally as three divine persons who co-exist as one God in a unity sublimely unique, but best likened to that of a family, or a community, or a society.”[18] These statements indicate that Plantinga and Thompson ascribe personhood to human beings and the trinitarian members univocally. Furthermore, between the Trinity and Incarnation the term person must be “univocal…since it is identical in respect to one person of the Trinity, the Incarnate One.”[19] In other words, personhood is ascribed to the members of the immanent Trinity in exactly the same sense as it is ascribed to Jesus in the economy of salvation. The univocal understanding of personhood leads to the assertion that “the Holy Trinity is a divine, transcendent society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities.”[20] Stated differently, “the social conception of the Trinity offers a fundamental vision of God as a giving and open community of divine persons.”[21]

Other Social Trinitarians take similar positions. C. Stephen Layman defines a person (whether human, angelic, or divine) as “a thing capable of feeling, **(p.137)** thinking, willing, and acting—a thing capable of conative and cognitive states.”[22] God, then, “is identical with the three divine selves in a special relationship. In other words, on this view, God is a social entity, analogous (ontologically) to a marriage.”[23] Similar descriptions of the Trinity are ubiquitous in popular-level works of theology too. Clark Pinnock provides a typical example. Social Trini-tarianism is defined by Pinnock as the view that “God is constituted by three subjects, each of whom is distinct from the others and is the subject of its own experiences in the unity of the one divine life.”[24] God “is a communion of loving persons” or a “triadic community.”[25] Tritheism is avoided by saying that “the Trinity is a society of persons united by a common divinity” and a “singleness of purpose.”[26] Layman and Pinnock are representative of philosophers and theologians (respectively) who ascribe personhood and society to God without so much as raising the question of how human language refers to God in himself.

When we turn to the influential exposition of ST by Jürgen Moltmann it quickly becomes apparent that the driving force behind this version of ST is the desire to use the Social Trinity as a model for human communities. Because of this task, one would expect Moltmann and his followers to employ “person” and “society” univocally. Often it appears that they do. Moltmann, however, will ultimately

deny that there is a univocal sense of personhood that can apply to the members of the Trinity and humanity. He will even go further and say that the Father is not a person in the same, identical sense as the Son; the Son is not a person in the same, identical sense as the Spirit; and the Spirit is not a person in the same, identical sense as the Father.[27] Each of the Three is not merely a unique person, but a unique kind of person exemplifying a unique personhood due to the manner in which each exists perichoretically in the other two. Moltmann's descriptions of each unique personhood seem to fulfill the threefold definition of what it is to be a person "in the modern sense" described above. Furthermore, in one important respect personhood is a univocal concept for Moltmann: the unique personhoods of the Father, Son, and Spirit are identical in the immanent Trinity and the economy of salvation.[28]

Miroslav Volf will take a more explicitly traditional position on these issues. Because humans are not divine and our conceptions of the Triune God do not correspond exactly with who the Triune God is, "Trinitarian concepts such as 'person', 'relation', or '*perichoresis*' can be applied to human community only in an analogous rather than a univocal sense. As creatures, human beings can correspond **(p.138)** to the uncreated God only in a *creaturely* way; any other correspondences than creaturely ones would be wholly inappropriate."[29] Here Volf follows the traditional direction of analogy: personhood, relationality, and perichoresis in the Trinity are primary, their application to human society secondary. Thus, Volf follows the contours of classical trinitarianism when he tells us that strictly speaking "there can be no correspondence to the interiority of the divine persons at the human level."[30]

Some self-professed Social Trinitarians interpret (2) and (3) by splitting their ticket. Stephen T. Davis, for example, stipulates that a person, "whether divine or human, is a property-bearer that is conscious, and has intellect, will, and the ability to be an agent."[31] But this does not lead Davis to conclude that God is a society. Instead, on his view "God is something *like* a community." He goes on to view state that "some more radical defenders of ST claim that God *is* a community, but in my that statement swings too dangerously close to Tritheism for comfort. Three Gods who are unified in will and purpose is not orthodox Trinitarianism."[32] Why can God be something *like* a community but cannot actually *be*a community? Davis attributes this limitation to perichoresis.[33]

We are left with questions. Does STattribute the same notion of personhood to divine and human persons, or is personhood analogical or equivocal? Are the

Father, Son, and Spirit persons in the same sense as each other, or does each exemplify a unique form of analogical personhood? In some of the quotations above personhood is defined in terms of centers of consciousness, will, etc. but conspicuously absent is any talk about persons being constituted by their social relations or about true unity always being unity-in-multiplicity. Are some Social Trinitarians abandoning the threefold understanding of full personhood that gave rise to the *social* model in the first place? Lastly, should we describe God as a society or something like a society? If the latter, in what specific ways is God like a society and in what ways unlike?

Whatever else the "Social Trinity" may be, it is a very popular but highly equivocal label. It would be helpful for scholars who consider themselves Social Trinitarians to begin a conversation amongst themselves to clarify these issues.

## The Social Trinitarian Hermeneutic

As one would expect, Social Trinitarians attempt to ground the model's key claim about divine personhood in scripture.[34] Questions regarding patristic precedent **(p.139)** are ultimately irrelevant if there is no biblical basis for a doctrine. They also cite scripture to show the superiority of the social model over classical trinitarianism. Two types of passages are most frequently cited. The first group consists of passages from the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation in which Jesus, the Father, and/ or Spirit are visibly distinct from one another (e.g., at Jesus' baptism) or portrayed as communicating with one another (including prayer). Two primary conclusions are drawn from these texts: (1) Jesus, the Father, and Spirit are distinct selves; and (2) according to the biblical evidence "the distinction of the Persons is a more basic datum than their ultimate unity."[35] The second group of passages are cited to establish and describe the perichoretic unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. These are found primarily in the Gospel according to John.

Moltmann describes the hermeneutical assumptions that ground this reading of the biblical text. "The New Testament talks about God," he tells us, "by proclaiming in narrative the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, which are relationships of fellowship and are open to the world."[36] The history of Jesus recounted in the New Testament is the revelation of the Trinity in itself. "It is in his [Jesus'] historical and eschatological history that we can perceive the differences, the relationships and the unity of the Father, Son and the Spirit."[37]

There will be more to say about this hermeneutic later. Here we can simply

observe that reading the inner life of the Trinity directly from the New Testament narratives effectively collapses the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinities. Some ST writers are not as explicit about this as Moltmann is, but their use of scripture leads to the same place.

## Part 2: Critique

We now move from description to criticism. On the face of it Social Trinitarianism appears to be an innovation. Much of ST's popularity and acceptability depends on the story its proponents tell about the development of patristic theology. In what follows I will highlight serious challenges to the ST narrative familiar to patristics scholars but which have received scant attention from Christian philosophers and systematic theologians. I will then identify two ways in which ST seems to be committed to incompatible theses regarding person-hood, sociality, and perichoresis. Finally, I will suggest that the biblical hermeneutic **(p.140)** employed to substantiate ST would have disastrous consequences for our most basic understanding of God if it were consistently applied across the canon.

### Questioning the Story

The story of the development of trinitarian theology described above has become the standard account widely accepted by proponents and critics of ST alike. Few attempt to establish its truth by means of detailed analysis of the primary sources.[38] Many theologians and philosophers assume the veracity of this commonplace apparently unaware of the fact that it has been rigorously challenged from two fronts. First, ever since the narrative was put forward, it has been countered by an alternate story that is prima facie more plausible. Second, scholars dispute the key assumption shared by both narratives—that the trinitarian theologies of the Greek East and Latin West can be distinguished from one another by reference to significant metaphysical disagreements.

In an important essay, Michel René Barnes has described how a contrast between patristic and scholastic trinitarian theologies in the work of Théodore de Régnon was transformed by later scholars into the ubiquitous characterization of Greek and Latin trinitarian theologies we find in ST literature.[39]This was a misreading of de Régnon that eventually became the standard paradigm through which the relevant patristic texts were read. Barnes also describes a counter-narrative advanced by several French scholars in response to the standard para-digm.[40] Largely ignored by Anglo-American scholarship, this version of the story identifies the Augustinian approach as person-oriented and the Cappadocian as unduly nature-oriented. It is Augustine who begins with the presupposition of individual persons while the Cappadocians presuppose analogies of material causation and fail to move beyond them to make the individual divine persons foundational for trinitarian theology. This can be seen in the fact that Cappado-

cian theology is particularly concerned to defend the term *homoousias*and employs *physis* and *energeia* as fundamental categories. Whereas the Cappadocians **(p.141)** primarily describe the Trinity with the essentialist language of metaphysics, Augustine prefers decidedly personalist terms such as the Word and Wisdom of God and personalist analogies, including the much maligned psychological analogy. The virtues and vices of the Augustinian and Cappadocian approaches to the Trinity are precisely the opposite of those attributed to them in the standard paradigm.

If we must identify the Cappadocian and Augustinian approaches as either personalist or essentialist, the second narrative tells the more plausible tale because it identifies the essentialist approach with the theology most concerned with essentialist categories like *homoousias* and *physis* and which favors material analogies of the form X from X (e.g., light from light, ray from sun, etc.). In any case, this story shares the chief fault of the standard paradigm: it is intent on finding fundamental differences between Eastern and Western trinitarian theologies that may not exist.

Scholars have begun to question whether there really are substantial metaphysical differences between the trinitarian theologies of the Greek East and Latin West after all. For example, Philip Cary has defended the thesis that "Classical trinitarianism is one and the same doctrine, whether it be expressed in Latin or in Greek." Latin and Greek trinitarianism each have their own nuances and special emphases, but they do not differ substantively in their essential logic.[41] To make this case Cary begins by identifying two rules usually associated with Latin trinitarianism. The first states that "all works of the Trinity 'outward' (*ad extra*) are indivisible." The second asserts that "in God all is one, wherever the opposition of relations does not stand in the way." These two rules help to form the basis and justification for the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinities in Western theology. They are also at the heart of what Fred Sanders describes as the ST project's "instinctive attempt to bridge the gap between the richly inter-personal economy (Jesus and his Father) and the sheer austerity of the relations of origin confessed by classic trinitarianism (paternity and Wlial-ity)."[42] Cary argues that the Cappadocians developed versions of each of these rules before their colleagues in the West, both of which were later enshrined in John of Damascus' influential précis of Eastern theology, *De Fide Orthodoxa*.[43] If Cary is right about this, then the indivisibility of operations and the opposition of relations are at the heart of classical trinitarianism as such and cannot be readily jettisoned. Attempts to use Greek trinitarian theology to

critique Latin trinitarian theology on these two points turn out to be confused criticisms of classical trinitarianism as a whole. As for Social Trinitarianism, according to Cary, “Genuinely social doctrines, in which the Trinity is conceived of on the model of a **(p.142)** society of three human persons, are a recent *Western* phenomenon, dependent on the modern notion of ‘person.’ To ascribe a ‘social’ Trinity to the Greek Fathers is to read modern *Western* preoccupations into ancient Eastern theology.”[44]

Whether the divine essence is a universal constitutes another significant metaphysical difference supposedly separating Eastern and Western trinitarianism. Gregory of Nyssa asserts that the divine essence is a universal; Augustine decisively denies it. On the surface this looks like just the sort of fundamental disagreement that would support the ST story. But, Richard Cross argues, if we take into account the divergent metaphysical presuppositions informing these assertions it turns out that this difference is more apparent than real.[45] To show this, Cross produces a typology of theories regarding the relation between particulars and universals that avoids the use of common trinitarian terminology. He then examines statements from Gregory, Augustine, and others in light of the typology. Despite the verbal contradiction he contends that “the Cappadocian generic interpretation and the Augustinian unitary interpretation do not differ in any substantial metaphysical way.”[46] The two sides simply understood universals differently but were in substantive agreement on the key issues with respect to the Trinity. Cross brings the conclusions of his study to bear on ST claims when he states, “there seems no reason to suppose that Eastern views of the divine essence and relations are necessarily much closer to social views of the Trinity than Western views are.”[47] Furthermore, like Cary, Cross finds significant agreement between East and West on the indivisibility of operations and the individuation of the trinitarian persons by relations.[48] Do East and West adhere to two different models of the Trinity? They do not if Cross is correct.

What of the ubiquitous assertion that the East begins with or prioritizes the plurality of persons while the West begins with or prioritizes the unity of God? In a series of detailed articles Lewis Ayres contends that neither Augustine nor the Cappadocians “begin” their trinitarian theology with considerations of divine unity or plurality.[49] Rather, all those who sought to uphold the Nicene definition both immediately prior to the council of Constantinople (ad 381) and subsequently were primarily concerned to explain the inseparable operation of the Triune God. With regard to Gregory's*On Not Three Gods* frequently cited as

precedent for ST, Ayres claims that it has been widely misread.[50] Far from **(p.143)** supporting something like ST, Gregory's purpose was to "point the reader away from speculating about the 'social' analogy." He instead wants to point his readers towards an account of divine power and ontological difference that can ground the grammar of human speech about God, thereby setting the stage for analogical descriptions of the Godhead.[51]

Ayres has also written an impressive monograph in which he presents a new narrative about the trinitarian controffersies of the fourth and early fifth centuries.[52] In it he repeatedly demonstrates that the competing theologies of the period cannot be neatly classified as Eastern or Western. The imposition of these categories in previous patristics scholarship, he contends, has distorted our reading of key texts. Nor does Ayres find much evidence to support the idea that some pro-Nicene writers prioritized divine unity over plurality or vice versa. Through careful re-readings of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and many others, Ayres identifies several basic interpretive strategies, epistemological concerns, and theological presuppositions that led to a common theological grammar at the foundation of *all* pro-Nicene theology.[53] Key among these are the closely linked doctrines of divine simplicity, inseparable operation, and appropriation. Along the way he occasionally contests ST claims about trinitarian theologies of the period.[54] For example, among pro-Nicene writers, he writes:

> We never find descriptions of the divine unity that take as their point of departure the psychological inter-communion of three distinct people. The phraseology of this sentence is intended precisely: I mean that we do not find pro-Nicene authors offering as an analogical base for discussing the unity of God the sort of unity observed between three people engaged in a mutual project or sharing a common goal. The essential divisions observed in such cases would render this analogy fundamentally insufficient.[55]

Two observations lie at the foundation of this claim. The first is the simple failure to discover such analogies (Ayres disputes the exegesis of those who claim to have found them). Equally important is his observation regarding the role that divine simplicity played in the formulation of pro-Nicene theology. Put simply, analogies of the sort favored by Social Trinitarians would contravene the logic and grammar of divine simplicity employed by all pro-Nicene theologians, East or West. They did not see divine simplicity as a threat to the trinitarian understanding of God as so many modern theologians do. To the contrary, the

doctrine of divine simplicity was employed by pro-Nicene writers in surprisingly plausible **(p.144)** ways to cogently answer non-Nicene criticism, solve difficult conundrums, and reconcile disparate biblical texts.[56] If divine simplicity is as central to pro-Nicene theology as Ayres claims, then rejecting simplicity on the ground that it is incompatible with trinitarianism reflects a simple failure to understand classical trinitarianism.[57]

If the ST project is to succeed, then its proponents must move beyond the repetition of simplistic commonplaces and enter into dialogue with the kind of careful historical scholarship surveyed above. Unless the conclusions of scholars like Ayres, Cross, Cary, and Barnes can be countered with equally nuanced and plausible readings of the primary sources, we should not accept the idea that that there have always been two approaches to the Trinity. Nor should we classify STas a version of the classical doctrine of the Trinity that happens to emphasize, prioritize, or begin with God's threeness rather than oneness. Social Trinitarianism appears to make a new claim in the history of Christian theology, one that is deeply (and ironically) *Western* in its concerns and presuppositions. Social Trinitarianism may be defensible, but we should not paper over its modern Western pedigree.[58]

## Questioning the Premises of the Social Trinitarian Thesis

Critics of ST frequently insist that three divine beings in a society or community remain three Gods.[59]The typical criticism of ST amounts to this: perichoresis delivers too little unity to render a plausible monotheism. ST exponents respond by eloquently describing the mutual dependence, inseparability, and supreme sublimity of shared life within the bonds of perichoresis. In doing so they **(p.145)** sometimes leave the impression that the Godhead is conceptualized like three harmonious conjoined symbiotic deities.[60] Whatever insight ST may provide, God should not be portrayed as a community of divine Siamese triplets! If this is all that perichoresis gets us, then ST is indeed a sophisticated form of tritheism. But there may be another problem related to perichoresis lurking about.

Stephen T. Davis was earlier cited saying that God can only be *like* a community or society but cannot actually *be* one due to perichoresis.[61] Davis seems to have an intuitive sense that one cannot consistently ascribe to the Father, Son, and Spirit full personhood, full sociality, and a robust notion of perichoresis. Any notion of perichoresis strong enough to mitigate the accusation of tritheism is too

strong to maintain full personhood within the Trinity.

(1) The members of the Trinity are persons in the modern sense who are (minimally) distinct agents who possesses their own center of consciousness, thought, and will.
(2) Perichoresis binds the divine persons together.
(3) Perichoresis guarantees unity of action between the divine persons. (Definition)
(4) Therefore, the divine persons cannot be persons in the modern sense *and* bound together by perichoresis.

The key to the conclusion lies in the fact that premise (1) gives us prima facie reason to think that the divine persons could potentially disagree with one another. If they can disagree, then either (2) or (3) is false. But premise (3) is true by definition. This leaves two options: either find another ground for the monotheistic claim to replace (2) or reject premise (1). Regardless of which route is chosen, all versions of ST that affirm full personhood and perichoresis appear to be internally incoherent.

David Brown, Thomas V. Morris, and Richard Swinburne each attempt to explain how there could be three distinct wills within the Trinity but no realistic possibility of conflict.[62] They also try to explain how three persons with distinct wills can nonetheless be necessarily harmonious in their willing. My response is straightforward. If the divine persons cannot differ because they necessarily act in concert with one another, then attributing distinct wills is superfluous. Attributing distinct wills to two or more persons *simply is* an admission of the possibility of difference. If there can be no difference, then the individuals share a single will.

A second problem arises from the ST commitment to full modern person-hood. Recall Moltmann's axiom: “Without the social relation there can be no **(p.146)** personality.”[63] If so, then the converse must also be true: without full personhood there can be no genuine social relation. Social Trinitarians say a lot about the attributes of full personhood but relatively little about what kind of genuine social relations are required to constitute full personhood. In fact, they don’t attribute much sociality to the Godhead at all. If the ST threefold definition of personhood is true, then the absence of genuine society entails the absence of full personhood. The argument can be formalized as follows.

(1) Without genuine society there can be no persons in the modern sense.

(Moltmann's axiom)
(2) No version of ST describes the Trinity as a genuine society. (My contention)
(3) Therefore, the divine persons are not persons in the full, modern sense.

The first proposition stems from the core ST commitment as it was originally expressed. Personhood and sociality are so intertwined on this view that persons are constituted by their *social* relations with one another. There is no warrant for labeling any theology that denies this a social doctrine. Thus, when ST ascribes personhood to the trinitarian members in the "strongest, most eminent and unimpaired sense,"[64] premise (1) requires concomitant sociality in the strongest, most eminent, and unimpaired sense to constitute that personhood. Arguably, that is not what ST theorists assign to the Trinity.

Social Trinitarians regularly describe sociality within the Trinity in terms of shared life and love, inter-personal communication, cooperation, and mutual dependency. The relations of paternity, filiation, and spiration are sometimes parsed out as if they are social relations (emphatically *not* how they are understood in the tradition). But at best this is a minimal, highly attenuated notion of society. A society in the strongest sense of the term would attribute a much richer nexus of relationships, at least analogously. After all, in human societies persons do not exist within just three or four familial-like relationships.

Human beings simultaneously experience interconnected political relationships, economic relationships, workplace relationships, sexual relationships, and extended family relationships. We also experience many social relationships that require inequality of position, e.g. parent-child, teacher-student, doctor-patient, commander-soldier, patron-client. Can we really say that the Trinity is a society or even *like* a society if it contains nothing even remotely corresponding to these various elements of human society? Proponents of ST may assert that God is a society, but the narrow range of social relationships they ascribe to the Trinity makes the Trinity *like* a society in only a few modest respects. Hence, the social constitution understanding of personhood requires us to say that the trinitarian members are *like* modern persons in only a few modest respects.

**(p.147)** I suspect that some self-professed Social Trinitarians will gladly deny that persons are necessarily constituted by social relations. It would be fitting for those who do to find a new name to refer to their sort of non-classical, non-social trinitarianism. Those convinced of the relational ontology of personhood are in a tougher position. They might reconsider whether there are only three divine

persons in the Godhead and posit a richer nexus of social relationships, but this would be to abandon trinitarianism altogether. Alternatively, they can argue that full sociality is indeed the kind of seemingly-attenuated sociality we see in the Trinity. But how would this affect the practicality of the doctrine? If human society at large and the church in particular are ultimately meant to mirror the Trinity, then should we seek the elimination or at least the devaluation of a great many of our social relationships? Whatever the answer to this question is, it does not seem that ST can simultaneously deliver full personhood, full sociality, and the kinds of practical insights its proponents derive from it.

### Hermeneutical Over-determination

Finally we come back around to the hermeneutic employed to ground ST in scripture. The chief problem with Social Trinitarian arguments from scripture does not lie in the exegesis of individual passages. Nor is it that they fail to prove the distinction of the persons, their self-awareness, or perichoresis. Rather, it is found in the fact that this hermeneutic collapses the distinction between the economy of salvation narrated by the text and the life of God in himself. The distinct roles assigned to the Three in the New Testament narratives become direct descriptions of their immanent relations and the ground of their ontological unity. Arguing from the text in this fashion cannot deliver a good argument in favor of ST against classical trinitarianism. Consistently applying this hermeneutic will lead to conclusions most Christians would find deeply problematic.

Classical trinitarians have always been aware of the kinds of texts modern Social Trinitarians cite in favor of their distinctive positions. Moreover, they have always accepted the evidence drawn from these narratives in a straightforward manner. But they are seen as straightforward descriptions of the*economic* Trinity, not the immanent Trinity. As Fred Sanders correctly observes, “Everyone is bound to be a social trinitarian at the economic level.”[65] Therefore, classical trinitarianism and Social Trinitarianism are empirically equivalent theories. As long as ST proponents argue primarily from New Testament narratives, there are no reasons to prefer one view to the other. If scripture can be used to adjudicate between them, then the evidence will be found primarily in genres other than narrative.

The hermeneutical eradication of the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity seems harmless when it is applied to most New Testament **(p.148)** narratives, but it has disastrous consequences when consistently applied

over the entire canon of scripture. The problem, simply put, is that it proves entirely too much. This was a significant lesson learned from the fourth-century trinitarian controversies, but it has been widely forgotten. Richard Hanson explains:

> What the Arians were insisting was that the Bible does not speak analogously nor symbolically about God, but directly. When it described God as the Father and Christ as his Son, it could only mean that, like all fathers in human experience, God at one point cannot have been a father and, like all sons in human experience, Christ at one point must have been non-existent before he was begotten by the Father. The pro-Nicene theologians gradually realised that this could not be true, that if it was true it made nonsense of the biblical doctrine of God, and that the Bible speaks of God in language which is analogous, symbolic, but nevertheless true.[66]

If the God-talk in scriptural narrative speaks about God directly, giving us an unobstructed and accurate view of the differences, relationships, and unity of the Father, Son, and the Spirit, then it will tell us much more besides. Consider a few of the narratives in Genesis. During the cool part of the day God decides to take a walk in the Garden of Eden (3:8). In the Babel story God comes down from heaven to investigate the situation (11:5). He appears to Abram to identify the boundaries of the land of promise (12:7). He appears as an angel to Hagar and Abraham (16:7, 13; 22:11–15). Later the Lord visits Abram by the oaks of Mamre as one of three men (18:2). He wrestles with Jacob all night long (32:22–30). If scripture refers to God directly, then on the basis of this handful of passages we should conclude that God is an embodied human being or angel who enjoys taking walks through beautiful gardens and the occasional wrestling match. He does not always know what is going on here on earth, so sometimes he visits to check up on us.

Apart from the economic/immanent distinction there is little to warrant classifying these kinds of passages as theophany or anthropomorphic accommodation rather than descriptions of God-in-himself. When applied to the New Testament, a hermeneutic of direct reference will lead us right back to one of the causes of the Arian controversy: interpreting terms like Father, Son, and begetting univocally and then deducing that there must have been a time when the Son was not. There is no doubt that consistently applying the ST hermeneutic could deliver a much fuller range of social relationships upon which to ground full personhood for the members of the Godhead. It does so by opening up the possibility of developing a *fully* social trinitarianism, but, arguably, only by

rendering the biblical concept of God contradictory and nonsensical. Rather than go this route it is wiser to reacquaint ourselves with the reasons for which the Fathers rejected this sort of hermeneutic as completely inadequate.

## (p.149) Conclusion: Fully Social “Trinitarianism”?

In the last two sections I have hinted at the possibility of more fully social doctrines of God that may be more internally coherent and hermeneutically consistent than most forms of ST. Readers will probably be inclined to dismiss the possibility of someone developing such views. However, the last fifteen years have seen scholars label one more theology as a version of Social Trinitarianism: Mormonism. Historically Mormons have classified themselves as non-trinitarians, rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity outright as the product of uninspired speculation. In recent years striking parallels have been observed between long-established Mormon explanations of the Godhead's unity in terms of shared nature, purpose, power, and love and those offered by contemporary Social Trinitarians.[67] Mormon scholars now regularly refer to their understanding of God as a version of ST.[68] Mormon philosophers have even gone so far as to commend the revelations of their founding prophet as a resource for rebutting some of the criticisms offered against ST.[69]

According to traditional Mormonism, God the Father is quite literally an exalted man comprised of body, parts, and passions.[70] He has a wife with whom he begets spirit children, including all the inhabitants of this earth. Unlike the versions of STwe have been discussing to this point, the Mormon God is fully personal as an embodied, gendered, and sexual being. The Godhead ruling over this world is comprised of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They function as one God by virtue of their shared divine nature, their unity of purpose, power, and love, and their mutual indwelling. There is no distinction to be made between the manner in which they reveal themselves to humanity and what they are in themselves.[71] Furthermore, there are an infinite number of other Gods who share the same divine nature ruling other universes, including Gods above God the Father.[72] Within this theological vision social relationships abound. **(p.150)** Mormonism may represent the only fully social doctrine of God endorsed by any group claiming to be Christian.

Something seems to be wrong if the ST tent is so large that it attracts within its walls teachings about God that were universally classified as non-trinitarian and heterodox until very recently. This should establish beyond all doubt that Social

Trinitarians who are ostensibly committed to creedal orthodoxy have not done enough to clarify the commitments and boundaries of their model. Until that is done Social Trinitarianism will continue to refer to numerous incommensurable and sometimes underdeveloped theologies rather than a clearly defined, mature option within Christian theology.[73]

Notes:

(1) Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 433.

(2) Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Der Streit Der Fakultäten*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 65 (emphasis in original). Kilby (n. 1) questions whether doctrines need to be practical at all, undermining the presuppositions behind Kant's assertion. I am inclined to agree with Kilby's skepticism. We should not assume that true doctrines are necessarily practical.

(3) Proponents and critics of ST both accept the assumption that trinitarian theology must “begin” with either divine plurality or unity, thereby problematizing the other, e.g., Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 149 and Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203. It is not exactly clear what this means. By definition the doctrine of the Trinity claims that divine oneness and threeness are consistent with one another, so it makes no logical difference where one “begins.” In any case, the fact that modern theologians assume these to be obvious starting points does not mean the patristic writers did.

(4) This can sometimes look instead like a fallacious argument for innocence by association.

(5) The predominant formula Social Trinitarians have employed to sustain ST's monotheistic claim is shared generic divine nature + perichoresis. Each person is God (or *a* God) by virtue of the generic divine nature but perichoresis binds them so closely together that they function as one God. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig instead suggest that attributing divinity to each of the persons of the Trinity does not entail that each is God. On their view the persons and the Godhead stand in a part—whole relationship and only the Godhead as a whole is God in the strict sense. See Moreland and Craig,*Philosophical*

*Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 590–92.

(6) Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 129; cf. 140.

(7) Ibid., 85.

(8) John Laird, *Problems of the Self: An Essay Based on the Shaw Lectures Given in the University of Edinburgh March 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1917), 5.

(9) Ibid., 363.

(10) Ibid., 204.

(11) In particular, MacMurray's *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber, 1957) and *Persons in Relation*(London: Faber, 1961).

(12) Werner Stark, *The Fundamental Forms of Social Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998 [orig. 1962]), 1.

(13) Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 145.

(14) Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 229.

(15) The same observation is made by John L. Gresham, Jr., “The Social Model and Its Critics,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46/3 (1993): 330.

(16) Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 22; cf. 30–31.

(17) Thomas R. Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Trinity and Kenosis,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 176; Thomas R. Thompson, “Trinitarianism Today: Doctrinal Renaissance, Ethical Relevance, Social Redolence,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 32/1 (1997): 29.

(18) Thompson and Plantinga, “Trinity and Kenosis,” 176; Thompson, “Trinitarianism Today,” 30.

(19) Thompson and Plantinga, “Trinity and Kenosis,” 168.

(20) Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” 27; Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23/1 (1988): 50.

(21) Thompson and Plantinga, “Trinity and Kenosis,” 174.

(22) C. Stephen Layman, “Tritheism and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5/3 (1988): 292.

(23) Layman, “Tritheism and the Trinity,” 293.

(24) *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 35.

(25) Ibid., 22, 35.

(26) Ibid., 35, 29.

(27) *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 189. Moltmann appears to back away from this in recent work when he speaks of the “homogenous divine persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” See, e.g., “God in the World—the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 373.

(28) This is very much at the foundation of Moltmann's project. See *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 61–96.

(29) “‘The Trinity is our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14/3 (1998): 405. The point is made with respect to ecclesiology in*After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 199.

(30) *After Our Likeness*, 210.

(31) *Christian Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.

(32) Ibid., 63.

(33) Ibid., 65.

(34) For representative examples, see Moltmann, *Trinity and Kingdom*, 65–90;

Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” 23–27; Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 193–210; J. Scott Horrell, “The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity,” in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 56–59.

(35) David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 287. Brown gives the impression that this is the result of historical-critical scholarship, but it is really the result of a simple plain-sense reading of the text.

(36) *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 64.

(37) Ibid., 65.

(38) The most detailed discussions of the primary texts from an ST perspective are found in Hodgson,*The Doctrine of the Trinity*; Brown, *The Divine Trinity*; Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity,” *Thomist* 50 (1986): 325–52; and Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 1997), 30–55.

(39) Michel René Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26/2 (1995): 51–79. In what follows I proceed appreciative of Kristin Hennessy's criticism of scholars who cite Barnes citing theologians who do not cite Régnon, while themselves not citing de Régnon (“An answer to de Régnon's accusers: why we should not speak of ‘his’ paradigm,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100/2 (2007): 180). I sin boldly. My interest here is not to bury de Régnon or to discuss his views (or misrepresentations of his views), but to highlight the existence of the counter-narrative Barnes describes.

(40) Thompson is one of the only recent ST advocates evincing awareness of the importance of de Régnon's work to the ST narrative (“Trinitarianism Today,” 24). However, Thompson does not discuss the resistance to the views (mis)attributed to de Régnon in subsequent scholarship.

(41) Phillip Cary, “On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner on the Trinity,” *Thomist*56/3 (1992): 365.

(42) Fred Sanders, “The Trinity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John B. Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.

(43) “On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism,” 372–86.

(44) Phillip Cary, “Historical Perspectives on Trinitarian Doctrine,” *RTSF Bulletin* 9 (1995): 6. Emphasis added. (As of 2/1/09 the unformatted text of this essay was available online at:http://www.scribd.com/doc/2385279/Historical-Perspectives-on-Trinitarian-Doctrine-by-Phillip-Cary).

(45) “Two Models of the Trinity?” *Heythrop Journal* 43/3 (2002): 275–94.

(46) Ibid., 290 n.1.

(47) Ibid., 290.

(48) Ibid., 285–89.

(49) Especially see “‘Remember that you are Catholic’ (serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8/1 (2000): 39–82 and “On Not Three People: The Fundamental themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology as seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*,” *Modern Theology* 18/4 (2002): 445–74.

(50) Sarah Coakley reaches similar conclusions in “‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion,” in *The Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123–44. She states: “Gregory's approach to the Trinity is not ‘social’ in the sense often ascribed to that term today; it does not ‘start’ with three and proceed to one. Nor does it attempt to ‘nail’ the meaning of divine hypostasis by particular reference to the analogy of three individual men: the analytic discussions here have been misled by an over-concentration on Gregory's Ad Ablabium, as well as by an insufficiently nuanced reading of that text” (p. 125).

(51) Ayres, “On Not Three People,” 446.

(52) *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Extensive critical discussion of this work and reply by Ayres can be found in several essays that appeared in *Harvard Theological Review* 100/2 (2007).

(53) Helpful summaries of his findings can be found at *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 3–4, 273–301, 430–35.

(54) E.g., *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 292–93, 357–58, 360, 363, 365 n. 5, 388, 409 n. 51, 417 n. 64, 424.

(55) Ibid., 292.

(56) Ibid., 286–88.

(57) Of course, there may be good reasons unrelated to the doctrine of the Trinity for denying that God is metaphysically simple. But if pro-Nicene theology depends upon simplicity as much as Ayres depicts, then it is the *denial* of simplicity that may be incompatible with orthodox trinitarianism.

(58) There may be one strategy for defending ST that is firmly rooted in the patristic tradition. One could argue that a doctrine within another theological locus is incompatible with classical trinitarianism and then argue that the doctrine is so significant that our trinitarianism must be revised to uphold it. Richard Cross suggests something along these lines when he says that something like STmay be required to sustain the patristic rejection of Patripassianism as heresy (see "Two Models," 294 n. 52 and the conclusion of his essay in this volume (Ch. 11) ). This particular move may not appeal to advocates of ST since so many of them reject divine impassibility, but other doctrines may be more viable candidates.

(59) Kelly James Clark, "Trinity or Tritheism?" *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 463–76; Edward Feser, "Swinburne's Tritheism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 42 (1997): 175–84; Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," 203–49; Jeffrey E. Brower, "The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: A Reply to Wierenga," *Faith and Philosophy* 21/3 (2004): 295–303; Dale Tuggy, "Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 269–87; Trenton Merricks, "Split Brains and the Godhead," in *Knowledge and Reality: Essays on the Occasion of Alvin Plantinga's Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Thomas Crisp, David Vanderlaan, and Matthew Davidson (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2006), 305–8; Michael C. Rea, "Polytheism and Christian Belief," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57/1 (2006): 133–48.

(60) This image is especially conveyed in Erickson's discussion of the metaphysical basis of trinitarian theology (*God in Three Persons*, 219–38).

(61) *Christian Philosophical Theology*, 65.

(62) Brown, *Divine Trinity*, 295–97; Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God*

*Incarnate* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 213–16; Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 171–76.

(63) Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 145. For the sake of argument I will grant that full personhood is constituted by social relations. To be frank, though, I consider this kind of language vacuous and confused if it is meant as a serious metaphysical claim (versus, say, a psychological account of human flourishing).

(64) Thompson and Plantinga, "Trinity and Kenosis," 176; Thompson, "Trinitarianism Today," 29.

(65) Sanders, "The Trinity," 45.

(66) R. P. C. Hanson, "The Bible in the Early Church," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 1:*From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 447.

(67) Representative examples predating the rise of ST can be found in Orson Pratt, "The Absurdities of Immaterialism," in *Orson Pratt's Works*, vol. 2 (Orem, Utah: Grandin Books, 1990 [original 1849]), 25, 30; James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899), 39–44; B. H. Roberts,*Answer to "Ten Reasons Why Christians Cannot Fellowship the Mormon Church*," (New York: Home Missions Council, 1921), 25–26.

(68) The assertion is made frequently in academic journals and books published by Mormon presses but can also be found in works intended for a wider audience, e.g., Richard Lyman Bushman,*Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6, 7; and Terryl Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2004), 319.

(69) David L. Paulsen and Brett McDonald, "Joseph Smith and the Trinity: An Analysis and Defense of the Social Model of the Godhead," *Faith and Philosophy* 25/1 (2008): 47–74.

(70) The Mormon description deliberately contradicts the description of God found in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and the Westminster Confession.

(71) This is especially clear from the kinds of deductions about God's nature Mormons draw from the canonized account of Joseph Smith's First Vision.

(72) Recent developments in Mormon theology have seen some Latter-day Saints move away from these kinds of doctrines. See further Carl Mosser, "And

the Saints Go Marching On," in *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 77–83.

(73) I thank Phil Cary, Steve Boyer, and Mike Rea for helpful suggestions for improving an earlier draft of this essay.

# How Many Times Does Three Go Into One?

**Keith Yandell**

> …We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Substance [Essence]. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.…in this Trinity none is afore or after another: none is more or less than another…the Unity in Trinity, and the trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped.[1](Athanasian Creed)
>
> There is but one living and true God…and in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. (Anglican Thirty-nine Articles)
>
> You add yet more absurdly, that there are three Persons who are severally and each of them true God, and yet there is but one God: this is an Error in counting or numbring; which, when stood in, is of all others the most brutal and inexcusable; and not to discern it is not to be a man. (A Brief History of the Unitarians, called Socinians)
>
> It must be universally true, that three things to which the same definition applies can never make only one thing to which the same definition applies…If, therefore, the three persons agree in this circumstance, that they are each of them perfect God, though they may differ in other respects, and have peculiar relations to each other and to us, they must still be three Gods; and to say that they are only one God is as much a contradiction, as to say that three men, though they differ from one another as much as three men can do, are not three men, but only one man. (Joseph Priestly, Tracts (London: printed and published by the Unitarian Society, 1791), vol. 1, 182; italics in the original)
>
> Let it be admitted, that you had proved the supreme divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the natural conclusion have been three distinct Gods, which is a doctrine expressly condemned by Scripture and reason. (The Trinitarian Controversy Reviewed: or a Defense of the Appeal to the Common Sense of all Christian People by the Author of the Appeal, London, 1791)

## (p.152) Questions Concerning Trinitarian Doctrine

A standard objection to the Athanasian doctrine is that it cannot be true since, given its canonical expression, as above, it is self-contradictory. Specifically, we are offered seven claims:

(1) The Father is God.
(2) The Son is God.
(3) The Holy Spirit is God.
(4) The Father is not the Son.
(5) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
(6) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
(7) There is one God.

If any one of these claims is false, then the doctrine of the Trinity is false. But (1)– (3), plus (7), entail the denials of (4), (5), and (6), and (4)–(6), plus (7), entails the denials of (1), (2), and (3). Dropping (7) is no alternative, for (7) expresses monotheism. Hence the doctrine of the Trinity is self-contradictory. It has no more chance of being true than the claim that 7, 11, and 17 are all the same number.

This objection misreads propositions (1)–(3). If the “is” of (1)–(3) is the “is of identity” we get the contradiction noted. That is an excellent reason not to read the “is” in (1)–(3) as the “is of identity”. Further, if we read (1)–(3) as using the “is of identity”, Trinitarian doctrine teaches, for example, that “all there is” of God is the Father. Similarly with the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is perhaps best understood as modalism, the view that God plays different roles or acts under different names, something like Batman and Bruce Wayne, and Trinitarians have been emphatic about rejecting modalism. How, then, are (1)–(3) to be understood?

I take (1)–(3) to be presupposing this: there is a set G of properties such that if something has all of the members of G, that is necessary and sufficient for being God or having the divine nature. Then (1) says that the Father possesses all the members of G, and (2) and (3) say that the Son and the Holy Spirit possess all the members of G as well. This leaves us with three persons having the divine nature. How can this be reconciled to (7), the statement of monotheism?

Another way of raising the issue is to appeal to:

> The Indiscernibility of Identicals: For all X and Y, and any property Q, if X has Q if and only if Y has Q, then X = Y.

Given this, if the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all possess all the members of G, then they are numerically identical. But then (4)–(6) are false.

**(p.153)** Then there are passages like this one:

> There are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and each is God, and at the same time all are one God and each of them is a full substance, and at the same time all are the same substance.[2]

It seems natural to talk about the Father as a substance, the Son as a substance, and the Holy Spirit as a substance. Each is biblically described as an agent, an initiator of actions for purposes, as possessing intelligence and will. The term "person" seems to fit nicely, and persons, at least for common sense, and lots of philosophers, are substances. It does not seem natural to speak of three persons as "all…the same substance." Of any three persons, surely any two could exist without the others. No matter how closely they resemble one another, are all of one mind, feel the same way about everything, there are three of them. Three persons do not make up one person. A family, triplets, siblings, friends, or a committee, yes; one single substance, no. But God too is described as an agent, as creating the world, calling Abraham, giving the law to Moses, and sending the prophets. How is it possible that each person is a substance, and the Trinity is also a substance? Is the Trinity a composite substance?

We have three ways of putting the question of whether Trinitarian doctrine is possibly true. One concerns how three persons can all have the properties necessary and sufficient for being God, and yet there be just one God. Another asks how the three persons can all possess the members of G and yet be distinct, given the Indiscernibility of Identicals. A third wonders how the persons can be substances and the Trinity also be a substance, unless the Trinity is a composite of three substances – something that leads to further questions. Could God "come apart"? Could one of the three substances "opt out"? Can one omnipotent person A prevent another omnipotent person B from acting in some manner in which B wants to act? If so, then is either being actually omnipotent, since if A can prevent B from acting, B – also omnipotent – can do the same to A. Then is either A or B actually omnipotent? Is there an equivocation on "substance" and, if so, of what sort? Is the equivocation fatal to this expression of the doctrine?

The preceding discussion has provided differently expressed concerns regarding the consistency of Trinitarian doctrine.

## Conceptual Context

Davis states the traditional account of the difference between Greek and Latin Trinitarianism. Though arguably not as historically accurate as was thought,[3] it gives us a good conceptual mapping. In addition, Davis notes that both Eastern and Western have contemporary successors. The Western view he refers to as **(p.154)** Latin Trinitarianism (LT) and the Eastern perspective he calls Social Trinitarian (ST). He contrasts the views along these lines:

> (1)…LT begins with, and takes as basic, the oneness of God, while ST begins with, and takes as basic, the threeness of God. (2) On ST the Persons are robust…enough to constitute a genuine "other" [to one another]. They are three centers of consciousness, will, and action.…On LT, the Persons are not robust; they are not three centers of consciousness, will, and action…(3) On ST the Persons share a universal nature (which we can call "divinity"), while on LT they share an individual nature ("God"). In other words, in ST the three Persons are all one kind of being, namely, God (of which there is but one instance), and so each is divine; while on LT the three Persons are all one individual being.[4]

There is enough variety within Social Trinitarianism to make me hesitant about accepting that label, though the view I will take here is closer to that than to LT. Nonetheless, the "three centers of consciousness" aspect of ST will be part of the sketch I offer as a logically consistent account of Trinitarian doctrine. As is the case for any such sketch, it has philosophical commitments, and I cannot in one essay do much more than mention some of them, and to critique some alternative suggestions. We turn to this latter task first.

## Dead Ends: Relative Identity

The idea of relative identity is described as follows by Peter Geach:

> …identity is relative. When one says "X is identical to Y" this, I hold, is an incomplete expression; it is short of "X is the same A as Y," where A represents some count noun understood in the context of utterance.[5]

An alleged mundane illustrative case is that of a clay jug that breaks and the pieces are glued together to make a clay cup: the clay is the same clay throughout the process but the jug is not the cup. The situation is: same clay, different vessels. More to the point, the Father is the same God as the Son, but

given the incarnation, the Father is not the same human being as the Son. The Father is **(p.155)** the same God as the Son, but not the same person as the Son is. These last two examples suggest a strategy for dealing with what are supposed to be inconsistencies in the doctrines of the incarnation and the trinity. Does this strategy work? Obviously, that depends on whether identity can be relativized.

The jug-to-cup case is redescribable without remainder as the same clay being used, first as a jug, then as a cup. It is *uses* of the clay that come and go as the clay goes merrily on. David Wiggins has argued against the identity-is-relative thesis in a way that can be represented as follows. Let K be some sortal term – some term T such that if T is true of X, then X belongs to some sort, a goat or a tree or a board, for example. Wiggins' view is that if some X is the same goat, tree, or board, as Y, then it follows that, for any property Q, X has Q if and only if Y has Q. Everything, he claims, is some sort of thing or other. If X and Y are the same item of one sort, then there is no sort or kind that the one item belongs to and the other does not, and if there is one nature or essence that both of two items share, then there is no nature or essence that one item has and the other item does not. It is impossible that:

(a) X is a T
(b) Y is a T.
(c) X is the same T as Y.
(d) X is a T*.
(e) Y is not the same T* that X is.

This is precisely what the relative identity theory claims is possible, and often true.

He argues for the falsehood of the relativity of identity view as follows. Suppose that:

(1) X is a T.
(2) Y is a T.
(3) X and Yare the same T.
(4) If X and Yare the same T, then for any property Q, X has Q if and only if Y has Q.

So:

(5) For any property Q, X has Q if and only if Y has Q. (1–4)

Now consider the claims:

(6) If X is a T, then X is the same T as X.
(7) X is the same T as X. (1, 6)
(8) X is a T*.
(9) If X is a T*, then X is the same T* as X. (10) X is the same T* as X.

The relative identity theorist claims that all of this is compatible with:

(8a) Y is not a T*, even though X is, and even though Y is the same T as X.

**(p.156)** Consider this value for Q: being the same T as X. Given (1)–(4), X has this property if and only if Y has it. But the same holds for this value of Q: being the same T* as X; X has this property only if Y has it. By (10), X has it. So from (5) and (10), it follows that:

(11) Y is the same T* as X.

Of course if Y is the same T* as X, then Y is a T*, and (8a) is false. Or, if you prefer, consider this value for Q: being a T*. Given (8), X has this property. Given (5), X has this property if and only if Y has it. So, given (5) and (8), it follows that Y has it. It follows, that is, that:

(11*) Y is a T*.

But then it follows that (8a) is false Hence identity is not relative. So endeavors to state the doctrine of the Trinity without inconsistency in a way that makes use of relative identity, insofar as successful, will provide support for the conditional *If identity is relative then Trinitarian doctrine is consistent.* Since the antecedent is false, however, the endeavor will fail even if the conditional is true. So while, so far as I can see, Peter van Inwagen has proved the conditional, the antecedent thereof is false.[6]

The error of the relativizer of identity lies in supposing that whether A and B are identical can be (metaphysically) determined by only a subset of their properties, or in supposing that identity is relative to description. The obvious reply to the argument just given is that (4), which is crucial for the argument, “begs the question.” But if one asks whether A and B can be “identical individuals” when A has a property that B lacks, or B has a property that A lacks, the answer is negative. Further, if A *can* be distinct from B, it is distinct from B. (This isn’t “further” is you count modal properties, which seem to me to be perfectly fine

properties.) This last reply assumes that metaphysical identity is necessary. Here is a brief argument for that.

Suppose you have to play a dangerous game. If you lose, you lose your life. If you win, you do not lose your life. The game is to say whether there is one person being described, or two. The description begins with: being seven feet three, having long red hair, being able to run a four minute mile, having Socialist tendencies, preferring pistachio ice cream with peanut butter as a dessert. Perhaps it is more probable that there is one person being described than two, but you have been warned not to settle for probabilities. Once you learn, however, that it is possible that the target that the description fits could be in China and in New York at the same time, you are safe in deciding that there are two people of whom the description is true. Possible difference entails actual difference. Hence actual identity is impossibility of non-identity. Metaphysical identity is necessary. **(p.157)** So nothing could have been some other thing in some other world, or under some other conditions. Identity can neither be relativized nor be contingent.

## More Dead Ends: Subordinationism – Ontological and Role

It is indisputable that Christian creeds speak of the Father "begetting" the Son and the Holy Spirit "proceeding" from one or both of his Trinitarian colleagues. Here, from the Athanasian Creed, is an example:

> we believe in one only God, who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, distinct according to their incommunicable attributes; namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things, visible and invisible; the Son is the Word, Wisdom, and Image of the Father, and the Holy Ghost is the eternal Power and Might proceeding from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost have each his personality, distinguished by their properties.

Taken by itself, this can be read as a way of applying Plotinian philosophy to Christian theology. The One is the highest being of all which is the source of the Intellect. The Father, as the One, begetting the Son (the Intellect) would require that the Father be, by nature, the cause of the Son, and the Son be the second highest being. In the creeds where "begetting" occurs, it does so in the context of language that utterly rejects this reading. Thus the Athanasian Creed, for

example, also says:

> For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost; the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.[7]

Whatever begetting is, the Son being begotten is not the Son's being "made" or "created" or having a lesser nature than that of the Father. Ontological Subordination (OS) is no account of the Christian Trinity. For a Christian, there aren't degrees of being God. The relevance of this point will be clear shortly.

We have noted that it is indisputable that Christian creeds speak of the Father "begetting" the Son, while also denying that the Son is created or "made." If one takes this statement as an eternal or everlasting begetting, one faces the problem of explaining what the begetting relation amounts to in this context, since various things that the term suggests are denied, such as the begetter predating the begotten.[8] If one thinks of "begetting" as being eternal or everlasting, there **(p.158)** remains the question as to whether generation gives begetter and begotten eternally different roles. Some answer affirmatively. They hold that, "within" the Trinity, there is a permanent difference in authority and, correspondingly, subordination unaccompanied by difference in nature.

What, precisely, does Role Subordinationism (RS) say? The answer seems to go as follows:[9]

> (RS) The Son is permanently subordinate to the Father and the Father is permanently authoritative over the Son.

Thus Grudem:

> The only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are the ways they relate to each other and to the rest of creation…if we do not have economic subordinationism, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons.[10]

So according to RS, if God is eternal – having no temporal properties, being "outside of time" – then the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father. If God is everlasting – without beginning or end, being forever "in time" – then the Son is

everlastingly subordinate to the Father. What I say will apply equally to either view of God and time. The philosophical justification for this is that without a hierarchy of persons, there would be no Trinitarian persons.

If (RS) is true, there are only two versions of it that are logically possible. Either (RS) is a non-necessary truth or (RS) is a necessary truth.[11] Each version faces **(p.159)** enormous difficulties, but it is important to keep in mind which version we are talking about.

For either version of (RS), the Trinitarian persons are distinct from one another only because there are relations of subordination and authority that hold among them, and these relations have to be relations of authority and subordination.

If (RS) is non-necessarily true, then there are various possibilities competitive to Grudem's version of it. Here are some:

(RS1) The Father is permanently subordinate to the Son.

(RS2) The Father is permanently subordinate to the Holy Spirit.

(RS3) The Father and the Son are permanently subordinate to the Holy Spirit.

(RS4) The Son is permanently subordinate to the Holy Spirit.

(RS5) The Son and the Holy Spirit are permanently subordinate to the Father.

There are other possibilities that involve two-tier subordination: C is subordinate to B who is in turn subordinate to A. (This seems in fact to be what the supporters of (RS) have in mind, with a two-tier Trinity: Father over Son, and Son over Spirit.) If (RS) is non-necessarily true then an omnipotent God could easily make some other variety of role subordination to be true. Other subordination relations could, if God is everlasting, actually hold at various times, or in relation to other civilizations than our own. Even if God is eternal, some other subordination relations could have held. Further, since RS rejects OS, there is no basis in the nature of the persons for the hierarchy being as it is. (There is an obvious reply to this point, namely to claim that (RS) is a necessary truth; we consider that shortly.) If the Trinitarian persons all equally meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for being God, then any subordination or authoritarian relation among them that is not freely chosen for some temporary purpose is arbitrary in the light of their being equally God.

There remains the view that (RS) is a necessary truth. Then, being necessary, the hierarchical relationship could not be arbitrary, though the question as to what grounds the necessity remains unanswered, save by saying that it could not be otherwise without saying what "in" the Trinity might make this so. Other problems arise. On this understanding of (RS), it is necessarily true that the Father is authoritative over the Son, and the Son subordinate to the Father. This raises a deep problem that can be put as follows. There are existence-entailed properties, properties Q such that X exists entails X has Q. Being self-identical is an example of such properties. Since everything that exists is self-identical, that property cannot be the basis of something belonging to a kind. Beyond **(p.160)** existence-entailed properties, the properties that a thing necessarily has are part of the nature of that item. So if (RS) is presented as a necessary truth, it entails that the Father has as an essential property of being authoritative over the Son and of course the Son lacks this property. The Son has as an essential property being subordinate to the Father and of the course the Father lacks that property. So the Father has an essential property – a property that is part of the Father's nature – that the Son does not have as part of the Son's nature, and the Son has an essential property – a property that is part of the Son's nature – that the Father does not have as part of the Father's nature. This entails that the Father and the Son do not share the same nature after all. On this view, it is no longer arbitrary that the Father is authoritative over the Son. But the price is that we have, not a Trinity of Persons who are all fully God, but a hierarchy of natures among the highest-ranking beings that there are. (RS), taken as being necessarily true, entails Ontological Subordinationism – if the Son has an A-quality nature, then the Father has an A + quality nature. Ontological Subordinationism is not an account or a doctrine of the Trinity. It is a rejection of that doctrine.

What is said philosophically in favor of (RS) is largely at least captured by these comments, again by Wayne Grudem:

> it seems right to conclude that God necessarily exists as a Trinity – he cannot be other than as he is.[12]

> The only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to the rest of creation…if we do not have economic subordination, that there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have three distinct persons…[13]

"Economy" here refers to the relations between, and the roles of, the Trinitarian

persons. The claim is that there would, and perhaps could, be no Trinitarian distinctions.

Some relations *produce* numerical difference. If A is the parent of B, then A has produced B, and of course what produces B is not identical to B. Other relations *presuppose* numerical distinctness among the relata. Tom cannot send Aaron to the store if Tom is Aaron. Mark Twain cannot be the sole author of the writings of Samuel Clemens if Twain is not identical to Clemens. Two points need to be made here. One is that while it is obviously true that if A and B stand in relation R to one another, it follows that A is not B (setting aside relations such as self-identity and such cases as *being the same member of species S as*), this does not remove the produced/presupposes difference: whether relation R between A and B is one that produces (causes) difference or presupposes difference (can hold between A and B only because there is a numerical difference between A and B that being in R did not cause). “Being a parent of” belongs to the first sort of relation, and “being under the authority of” is the latter sort of relation. But then relations of having authority over, and being subordinate to, presuppose distinctions among the Trinitarian persons, and thus leave the basis of those distinctions unexplained.

**(p.161)** Role Subordinationism is an inherently unstable position. It insists on the one hand on the full deity of each person, and so it cannot be that anything constituting full deity is the basis of authority or subordination among the Trinitarian persons. On the other hand, it asserts that there are roles of authority-possession and subordination among these persons, each of whom is fully divine. How, then, can the difference in authority status be anything other than arbitrary? It cannot be, unless it rests on some property had by one or more persons in the Trinity and not had by one or more of the other persons in the Trinity.

One response is that the authority – subordination roles are necessary – they cannot have failed to hold. So we read:

> These distinctions are essential to the very nature of God himself, and they could not be otherwise.

But we also read that

> no one person has any attributes that are not possessed by the others.[14]

But if the Son has as an essential property being subordinate to the authority of

the Father, and the Father has as an essential property being authoritative over the Son, then the Father and the Son have not only a difference in attributes, but a difference is essential attributes, and hence have different natures. The same holds for the Holy Spirit, who on the divine authoritative hierarchy view has either the property of being subordinate to the Father or the property of being subordinate to the Father and the Son, again as an essential property. So the Holy Spirit has a different nature from the Father, or the Father and the Son, and in the former case (Holy Spirit subordinate to only the Father) the Father has another essential property that the Son lacks, namely having authority over the Holy Spirit. It will not do to say that these are "only roles" because it is said to be essential to the Trinitarian persons that they have these roles. Having them is "essential to the very nature of God himself."

If the authority and the subordination statuses are essential to the very nature of God then the Trinitarian persons, each having a different status from the others, and one that is not grounded in or based on any properties that any Trinitarian person has other than having the status he has, then each Trinitarian person has a different nature – a different essence – with the difference in essence being utterly unexplained by, grounded in, or due to, any other attribute that any Trinitarian person has. This is no longer Role Subordinationism. It is Ontological Subordinationism, which Role Subordination rejects, and indeed criticizesas unorthodox and heretical.

## Some Better Roads?

We have noted three ways of putting the question of whether Trinitarian doctrine is possibly true. One concerns how three persons can all have the properties **(p.162)** necessary and sufficient for being God, and yet there be just one God. Another asks how the three persons can all possess the members of G (the set of essential divine properties) and yet be distinct, given the Indiscernibility of Identicals. A third wonders how the persons can be substances and the Trinity also be a substance, unless the Trinity is a composite of three substances – something that leads to further questions, such as "Could God come apart?" So we have "how one?," "how three?," and "one substance or three?".

How are we to understand (1)–(7)? One approach to this question is to begin by asking what individuates the Persons. This question is not answered by reference to "the identity of God" in the sense in which this phrase is used by, say, Richard Bauckham.[15] Here the identity of God is established by describing actions ascribed to God. God is the One who created the world, called Abraham from

Ur, gave the law to Moses, and sent the prophets. The issue is an epistemological one: what descriptions are true of God that allow us to identifyingly refer to God rather than to something else? I greatly appreciate what Bauckham says on this matter, but we are here concerned with the nature of God, which, while *manifested* in the actions described, is not *metaphysically defined* by those actions. After all, God could have simply not created, and still have been God, even though all those identifying references then would be false of God. We are asking what the metaphysical identity conditions of God might be. What we want is the "bottom line" regarding individuation. Materialists take elementary physical particles to be the ultimate particulars – the non-composite items of which every composite is made.[16] What can a Trinitarian offer here?

## Two Views of Properties and Individuation

What follows is an extremely elementary sketch of two possible ways of seeing trinity-in-unity in a Christian view of God. These sorts of views have been held since Plato and Aristotle, and contain nuances, subtleties, supporting arguments, critical arguments, and unexpected entailments galore. I can only hope to be as accurate as a very general sketch allows. I will not defend one account against the other, or against competitors. Thus what we have here is suggestive rather than definitive.

We begin with a simple linguistic exercise. Consider these true descriptions of a pillow: *the pillow has a property; the pillow has a color property; the pillow has a color property in the green range; the pillow is chartreuse*. How many properties have been ascribed to the pillow? The two most natural answers, I think, are "four" and "one": four if you think of each predicative ascription as expressing or**(p.163)** referring to its own property, one if you think that only the most specific predicative ascription expresses or refers to a property, and the other three are simply more and more abstract ways of describing that property. On the "four" view, all four propositions are true, and it might have been true that the pillow had a property, and true that it had a color property, and true that it had a color property in the green range, and false that it was chartreuse. On the "one" view, all four propositions are in fact true because the fourth is true, and since all the propositions have the same truth-maker, we have no need to refer to three extra properties to offer any explanation of the four propositions being true, though of course all the higher-order (more abstract) properties could be true were the pillow forest green rather than chartreuse.

We begin with a "four" view. On what I will call the "properties as universals"

view (PAU), we noted, there are four properties possessed by the pillow, one for each predicative ascription. What's more, there are properties such as *being chartreuse* and *being elephantine* – whether anything is colored chartreuse or is an elephant. These properties are "universals" and chartreuse cushions, and large grey mammals with long trunks and ridiculously little tails for their proportions, are chartreuse and elephantine in virtue of instantiating these universals. *Being chartreuse* is a better candidate for being a non-complex universal than is *being elephantine*, but whether it is non-complex or not, there are simple universals and they are the components of complex universals. Universals are said to be necessary to posit in order to explain a variety of things, among them property resemblance and natural laws. Some Christians have worried that if there are universals, then God must instantiate such universals as *being omnipotent, being loving*, and *being holy* in order to be God, and so God exists only if universals do. Since God exists only if God has the divine nature, which includes God's being omnipotent, God could not exist without universals and not even God can create God's own nature, since God would "already" have to have a nature in order to exist. Thus some Christians have rejected universals and accepted the propositional content of God's ideas as capable of playing any explanatory role that universals can play. Others have held that if universals exist, they exist necessarily, and thus God cannot destroy them. But as they cannot act, it is perfectly in order that God's nature involves God's instantiating these necessarily existing abstract objects that have no spatial, and perhaps no temporal, features.

On what I will call the "embedded property view" (EPV), there are no universals – not out of any general objections to abstract objects,[17] but because its proponents do not see what relationship an abstract object might have to a concrete thing in virtue of which the latter came to have a property, and because they find being told that the relationship of instantiation is primitive unhelpful. (They find the notion of universals as "operators" no more enlightening.) On this view, each property is "embedded in" its "owner." The phrase "embedded in" is to be at least partly understood in this manner: property Q is embedded in item X **(p.164)** only if (i) X has Q, (ii) Q exists only insofar as it is a property of X, (iii) X's having Q is not due to X's being in any relation to (instantiating) a universal. For EPV, every property is bearer-specific, not something that can have many instances though, depending on the property, it may resemble other properties. Every property is "owned" – for all Q, if Q is a property, then something has Q. (This is true of PAU *regarding instantiations* of universals.) Further, if Q is a property of item X, then it is true that *Necessarily, if Q exists, it is a property of X*. An apple's redness or Jon's headache cannot be the redness of some other

thing or the headache of some other person, though the redness of the apple and the aching of Jon's head may have twins, triplets, and so on. No bearer can exist without its having properties, and every bearer has essential properties. These points need clarification. No (contingent) bearer of properties must have some particular property every moment at which it exists. Property-exchanges are impossible, though one property-bearer may cause a twin property in another. As a simple example, when motion is “transferred” from a moving to a non-moving thing, the mover causes motion in a hitherto unmoving item, and the moving of the latter is its own moving. Having essential properties is to be understood as its being required by something being the kind of thing it is that it have some or other property that resembles other properties in such a way as to justify referring to them all by the same term. (*Resemblance* rather than instantiation is taken to be primitive.) Properties of a kind-defining sort are viewed, at least in part, as those that determine their owner's capacities and liabilities – what it can do and what can be done to it.

Descartes's view that we are thinking things does not entail that we must always be thinking the same thing. More carefully, Descartes holds that, so long as a mind exists, it is conscious, but this may be by way of thinking about individuation, listening to a CD of George Jones singing, or smelling the coffee brewing. Ways of being conscious form a natural class because they have a primitive resemblance to one another and do not have that resemblance to non-conscious things or states, and satisfy the characterization of kind-defining properties noted earlier. (Thus the Humean and Buddhist criticism of mind-body dualism that if there is an enduring self, there must be some constant mental state which the self perpetually has misses its target entirely.)[18] Further, while there is no specific property that must be embedded in (had by), say, Kim in order for her to be Kim, she must have some property or other in order to exist. On EPV, it is not *substance* or *property* that is a basic metaphysical category, but rather bearer-of-embedded-properties, where the properties are not instantiations of universals but are embedded in their **(p.165)** bearer. One can object that, on the embedded-property view, there are no uninstantiated properties. This is hardly surprising, since on that view properties are not instantiations, so there are no instantiated properties either. On this view, the claim that there are properties that things might have, but do not, should be understood as saying that there are property ascriptions that might have been true but are not. One can also object that if there are no universals, then there are no laws of nature, since the existence of the former is included in the truth conditions of the latter. On an embedded-property view, as has been explained, things can have essential

properties. (I won't try here to argue for realism concerning essences, though Trinitarian doctrine has typically – I think rightly – been put in terms of there being a divine nature or essence.) The nature of some item constrains what it can do and what can be done to it – its activities and its liabilities. Natural laws, insofar as they are expressed in the natural sciences, are descriptions of what, given their natures, things will do in (often idealized) circumstances. What makes them true is the natures of the things over which they range, and there are natural laws independent of any natural science description of them (as is also so for PAU). Parenthetically, there is, on the embedded property view, no "fictionalism" as well as no commitment to physicalism, and no claim that properties supervene on other properties or on their bearers.) This view of natural laws has an honorable history and considerable plausibility. So it is not clear that if a law is fundamental "then it must involve universals corresponding to [expressed by?] the predicates in the law-statement."[19] Anyone who thinks that universals must exist in order to provide truth conditions of some truth can refer instead to the instantiated-property view included in our sketch.[20]

With two views scantily sketched, we can come to their current relevance. If one accepts EPV, one can offer the suggestion that the bottom line of individuation is reflected in a basic category of a metaphysic where neither "substance" nor "property" plays that role, and "bearer-with-property" does. Bearers of properties, for EPV, are not composed of properties, but cannot exist without some. Properties, on EPV, cannot exist unowned, and cannot exist save as the property of the item that has them. There are no elements of which bearers-with-properties (no bearer can have only one) are composed. It is true that a property-bearer could have different embedded properties than it has, and that is a modal property of a bearer just as it is a modal property of every embedded property that it cannot belong to any item other than its actual owner.[21] For PAU, the **(p.166)** bottom line is bearer-of-property-instantiations and universals (instantiated or not). But each instantiation is owned and could not be owned by any other item than the one that does own it. There can be two or more items that instantiate the same universals, and there is nothing more primitive than a bearer-of-property-instantiations and universals.

At this point, we must try to say how the views sketched are relevant to the challenges with which we began. First, propositions (1)–(7):

(1) The Father is God.
(2) The Son is God.

(3) The Holy Spirit is God.
(4) The Father is not the Son.
(5) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
(6) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
(7) There is one God.

We said earlier that (1)–(3) should be viewed as using the "is of predication," and thus saying of set G (of properties possession of which is necessary and sufficient for a being's having the divine nature) that:

(1) The Father has every member of G.
(2) The Son has every member of G.
(3) The Spirit has every member of G.

For PAU, this will say of the Trinitarian persons that they instantiate the set of universals included in G. For EPV, this will say that G lists the properties that must be embedded in something in order for it to possess the divine nature, and each of the Trinitarian persons has every property of the list – each has a perfectly resembling embedded property such that having those properties is sufficient for Deity. So there can be three property-bearers each of which has properties sufficient for being divine. Then there are:

(4) The Father is not the Son.
(5) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
(6) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.

For PAU, these will say that the Father is one, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit still another, bearer-of-property-instantiations. For EPV, these will say that the Father is one, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit yet another, bearer-of-embedded-properties. This will give us two readings of the Indiscernibility of Identicals that understand "properties" differently, and on each of which (1)–(3) and (4)–(6) can be true – on which (1)–(6) are a consistent set of propositions. **(p.167)** They say that the divine nature is had by each of three bearers-of-property-instantiations, or each of three bearers-of-embedded-properties. That leaves (7), the assertion of monotheism.[22]

## Oneness Factors

I take it that the doctrine of the Trinity at least implicitly includes this claim:

(T1) For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P exist and

either of the other Trinitarian persons not exist.

This claim seems essential to there being one God who is Trinitarian. Further, the persons are often held to be so related that:

(T2) For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P will what is not willed by the other Trinitarian persons.

Perhaps we can add:

(T3) For any Trinitarian person P, it is logically impossible that P engage in any activity in which the other Trinitarian persons in no way engage.

Each of the persons is held to have been active in creation, the incarnation, and our redemption. Perhaps this is necessarily true "across the board." Each person is omniscient. Omniscience includes propositional omniscience – roughly so defined that *X is omniscient if and only if, for any proposition N that is true, X knows that N*. But there is also omniscience of awareness, roughly defined as *X has omniscience of awareness if and only if, for any item A, if A ever exists, X is aware of (non-inferentially acquainted with) the existence and properties of A so long as A exists*. The Trinitarian persons thus are thought of as bearing "psychological relations" to one another, of being non-inferentially acquainted with the thoughts and feelings,[23] etc., of the others. The divine persons "form a perpetual intercommunication."[24] So we have:

(T4) The persons of the Trinity have complete non-inferential awareness of one another.

(T1)–(T4) defines oneness of the three. A next step in the sketch would be to consider what properties are ascribed to God besides the few we have mentioned – holiness, justice, mercy, causal independence from anything extra-Trinitarian, and the like, presumably all viewed as essential properties – and**(p.168)** to consider them regarding, so to speak, what collective and distributive applications theyhave to the Trinity to see if this throws light on what the doctrine entails. We can do no more here than to return to (7) and "substance." First, I take the notion of a Trinitarian God to be *sui generis*. This does not, as it is so often assumed to, entail that we cannot offer meaningful property ascriptions. "Substance" has too many historical connections and conceptual connotations to do what is needed here.[25] So we have talked about bearers-of-properties, with two views of what properties are. I propose that either notion of property or property-bearer, insofar as otherwise in order, will do the job for

which the double use of “substance” was intended. The Trinity is a bearer of some properties that are not properties of the persons. *Being Trinitarian and being “all there is” to God* are two such properties. The Trinity, we have claimed, is such that each Trinitarian person is necessarily logically dependent on others. So there is no possibility of God shrinking to a binity. There is also no possibility of God expanding to four persons – necessarily, the Trinity can no more be added to than subtracted from – there is (and can be) no fourth person on whom the three persons mutually necessarily logically dependent. These features are relevant to “oneness” as well as “threeness.” That three property-bearers be so related that none can exist without the others seems to me not problematic. Using the term “simple substance” to refer to some item says that it is at least a relatively stand-alone individual (for Descartes, God or something dependent only on God). “Complex substance” indicates that the item so described is a composite of two or more such individuals, typically each of which can exist independently. Neither term fits the Trinity. The Trinity is three-property bearers of which (T1) – (T4) are true.

Regarding the Indiscernibility of Identicals, then, the suggestion is that taking the notion of a bearer-of-properties, in one or other of the senses sketched, as a primitive category in an ontology, will give numerical distinction incapable of, and so needing no, further individuation in terms of other sorts of items of which property-bearers are composed. Further, part at least of what it means to say that there are three numerically distinct persons in the Trinity is what (1)–(6) have been interpreted as saying. Further still, part at least of what it means to say, in accord with (7), that there is one Trinitarian God, is what (T1)–(T4) say. What is meant by “one God in three persons,” if the present sketch is correct, is at least partly what (1)–(6) and (T1)–(T4) say. That is obviously not all that it means to say that there is one Trinitarian God. Saying all of that is not on the cards. But if part of what it means is what is sketched here, and that part is logically consistent, then we have a sketch of a doctrine of the Trinity that meets the opening challenges. That would be a good beginning on a trip toward a goal we can’t reach.

Notes:

(1) Philip Schaaf, *Creeds of Christendom*, Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977; originally published in 1887), 66–68.

(2) Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 10. Translated by D. W. Robertson.

(3) It was challenged as early as 1983 by Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Chapman).

(4) Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” in Melville Y. Stewart (ed.), *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 35–52; quotation from pp. 38–39. Among supporters of ST, he identifies Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Cornelius Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). As contemporary representatives of LT, he cites Kelly James Clark, “Trinity or Tritheism,” *Religious Studies* 32/4 (December, 1996): 463–476 and Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, S.J., and Gerald O’Collins, S.J. (eds.), *The Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) (Ch. 4 of this volume).

(5) Peter Geach, *Logic Matters*, 3rd edn. (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1980), 238. He later adds mass nouns to count nouns, explaining the former restriction to be a slip of the pen; 247.

(6) Peter van Inwagen, “And Yet They Are Not Three Gods, But One God,” in Thomas V. Morris,*Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 241–278 (Ch. 12 of this volume).The essay was read as a conference paper and I was the commentator.

(7) Schaaf, *Creeds of Christendom*, 66.

(8) Though the Athanasian Creed was written to firmly reject OS, it seems fair to say that there seems to be a tension in the emphases here. On the one hand, the Son is not made, co-eternal with and of the same nature as the Father. On the other, the Son is begotten of the Father, which easily suggests an eternal or everlasting dependence of the Son on the Father. The dependence would be of this sort: the Father by nature does something, or the Father's nature necessarily “gives rise to” the Son in an asymmetrical relationship. The Father then also depends on the Son, since were the Son not to be in that asymmetrical relation, the Father's nature would be violated and the Father would not exist. I’m not at all confident about how exactly to put all of this, but perhaps the basic idea comes through. There is a way to read the creedal passages as lacking in tension. While the Son was “begotten before all worlds” by the Father, the purport of these words is that there never was a time at which the plans for our redemption were unmade, so that from the perspective of an eternal, or an everlasting, God,

who is omniscient, that matter was settled way before any of us were around to need redeeming. Correspondingly, the “proceeding” of the Holy Spirit occurred at Pentecost and continues on through the history of the church in ways often impossible to discern. “Thou art my Son, in this day I have begotten Thee” refers to the Bethlehem event. In sum, the language in the Creed need not be read in what might be called a heavily metaphysical way. It might rather be taken to be made true by the incarnation and its “surrounding” events and consequences. My purpose here is not to argue that this, exegetically from scripture or historically in context, is clearly the correct way to read the Creed. For a defense of this type of reading, see John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

(9) I take as my prime example a fervent defender of the view, influential in evangelical theological circles, Wayne Grudem, author of Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) from which we will have occasion to quote.

(10) Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251.

(11) In this essay, I will mean by “necessary” and “necessity” what, after Plantinga, is called “broad logical necessity” (BLN). This is to be understood as non-conventional in nature, not possibly based on anything that is contingent. BLN is a property of propositions. A proposition is any truth-bearer – anything that is either true or false. A proposition P is BLN if it is either syntactically such that its denial is formally contradictory (is of the form “p and not-p” or “there is, and is not, an X” or “X both has, and lacks, property Q” or the like) or it is semantically necessary (its denial is not formally contradictory, but there are no possible worlds “in” which it is true, or no way the world might be that made its denial true, or no conditions that might obtain in which its denial would be true). I take BLN propositions to be true of “thought and things” and accept the principle that a proposition has its modalities (necessity, possibility, contingency, impossibility) necessarily. This accompanies a realism concerning propositions. None of the above is an argument for anything. It does, I hope, somewhat explain what I intend by “necessary” and “necessity.”

(12) *Systematic Theology*, 241.

(13) Ibid., 251.

(14) Ibid., 251 and 253.

(15) *God Crucified* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

(16) Some consider the possibility of physics finding that, no matter how elementary a particle it finds, that particle is still composite, made up of still "smaller" things, and finally concluding that this goes on forever.

(17) Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), for a defense of there being such things.

(18) I here leave aside such properties as *being self-identical* which anything that exists necessarily has, such properties as *being identical to Socrates* which, if it is a property, is one that Socrates has so long as Socrates exists, more robust individual essences or *haecceities* (such as those provided by Leibniz's individual concepts), modal properties like *being non-identical to a prime number* which is necessarily a property of Socrates if he exists and if it is indeed a property (and of course Socrates' property of *being non-identical to a prime number* is twin to, but numerically different from, Plato's similar property), and so on. Roughly, I am concerned here only with contingently possessed non-modal non-haecceity properties.

(19) Peter Forrest, "The Operator Theory of Instantiation," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 84.2 (June, 2006): 215. Rom Harre and Edward H. Madden, *Causal Powers* (Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 1975) is one attempt to flesh out an essence-based account of causal laws.

(20) Another objection that can be made to EPV is that its doctrine of individuation involves an infinite regress. I do not think it does, but exploring the grounds of that objection, and possible replies to that objection, are beyond the scope of this essay. Of course infinite regress charges have been made against PAU as well, and also cannot be explored here.

(21) For simplicity, we have dealt here with monadic properties. Dydic and "higher" properties (relations) are also treated differently by the two views sketched. For PAU, the relations that items A and B are in relative to one another instantiate universals such as *being taller than and being seven feet apart*. For EPV, the relations between items A and B are also owned by A and B – if R holds between A and B, then R could not hold other than between A and B, though twins of R could. Relational properties are embedded in their relata. Non-monadic properties are obviously crucial for any doctrine of the Trinity.

(22) If there are three Trinitarian persons, each omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect, this does not entail or justify the conclusion that omnipotence, or the other attributes, are divided among the Persons. Even if the expression "a

third of omnipotence" is not like "a basket of square roots," it expresses no concept that applies to the Trinity.

(23) If God has feelings – not a topic for a footnote.

(24) Schaaf, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:37.

(25) See Howard Robinson, "Substance," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*., at plato.stanford.edu/entries/substance/.

# Part II

# Latin Trinitarianism

# A Latin Trinity *

**Brian Leftow**

The Athanasian Creed has it that Christians

> worship one God in Trinity…the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.[1]

Such odd arithmetic demands explaining. Some explanations begin from the oneness of God, and try to explain just how one God can be three divine Persons.[2] As Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas pursued this project, let us call it Latin Trinitarianism (LT). I now sketch a Latin view of the Trinity and argue that it is coherent.

## The Latin View

On LT, there is just one divine being (or substance), God. God constitutes three Persons. But all three are at bottom just God. They contain no constituent distinct from God.[3] The Persons are somehow God three times over, since as the Athanasian Creed puts it, "we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and Lord."[4] Thus too the Creed of the Council of Toledo has it that

> **(p.172)** although we profess three persons, we do not profess three substances, but one substance and three persons…they are not three gods, he is one God…Each single Person is wholly God in Himself and…all three persons together are one God.[5]

Again, Aquinas writes that

> among creatures, the nature the one generated receives is not numerically identical with the nature the one generating has…But God begotten receives numerically the same nature God begetting has.[6]

To make Thomas' claim perfectly plain, let us talk of tropes. Abel and Cain were both human. So they had the same nature, humanity. Yet each also had his own nature, and Cain's humanity was not identical with Abel's: Abel's perished with Abel, while Cain's went marching on. On one parsing, this is because while the two had the same nature, they had distinct tropes of that nature. A trope is an individualized case of an attribute. Their bearers individuate tropes: Cain's

humanity is distinct from Abel's just because it is Cain's, not Abel's.

With this term in hand, I now restate Thomas' claim: while both Father and Son instance the divine nature (deity), they have but one trope of deity between them, which is God's.[7] While Cain's humanity ≠ Abel's humanity, the Father's deity = the Son's deity = God's deity. But bearers individuate tropes. If the Father's deity is God's, this is because the Father just is God: which last is what Thomas wants to say.

On LT, then, there clearly is just one God, but one wonders just how the Persons manage to be three. If the Father "just is" God, it seems to follow that

1. the Father = God.

If "each single Person is wholly God in Himself," and both Son and Father have God's trope of deity, it seems also to follow that

2. the Son = God.

But then since

3. God = God,

it seems to follow that

4. the Father = the Son,

and that on LT, there is just one divine Person.

**(p.173)** (1) and (2) raise another problem. Cornelius Plantinga writes that an

> incoherence…comes out in the generation statements: the divine thing does not generate, get generated or proceed, despite the fact that Father, Son and Spirit, identical with it, do. How are we to imagine this?[8]

Plantinga's point is this. According to the Nicene Creed,

5. the Father generates the Son.

But the claim that

6. God generates God

is either unorthodox or necessarily false. Nothing can "generate" itself, i.e. bring itself into existence. So if (6) asserts that something "generates" itself, it is necessarily false. But if (6) asserts that one God "generates" a second God, it implies polytheism, and so is unorthodox. Now the Nicene Creed commits Christians to (5). In conjunction with (1) and (2), (5) yields (6). So if LT is committed to (1), (2) and (5), LT entails either unorthodoxy or a necessary falsehood. Of course, avoiding this problem by rejecting (5) is just unorthodoxy

of a different stripe.

The other options for LT are to reject all or just some of (1), (2), and the cognate claim that the Spirit is God. Rejecting all also seems to wind up unorthodox. For then there seem to be four divine things—Father, Son, Spirit and God. But if "each single Person is wholly God in Himself," each includes God somehow. So surely God is not a fourth divine thing in addition to any Person.[9] And in any case, on the doctrine of the Trinity, there are at most three divine things. That's why it's a doctrine of Trinity, not Quaternity. Rejecting just some can trim the number of divine beings to three—e.g. by accepting (1) but denying (2) and that God ¼ the Spirit. This would retreat to a form of Trinity rejected well before Nicaea. It also raises the question of just what the relation between God and the Son is.[10]

Everything is either God, an uncreated object distinct from God or a creature. To call the Son a creature is to embrace Arianism. If the Son is a creature, it's hard to see how He can be fully divine, or even divine at all—divine/creaturely seems an exclusive disjunction. But Scripture does not let Christians deny all deity to the Son.[11] Further, whether or not the Son is as divine as God, if He is created, He is **(p.174)** a divine being who *is not God*. The positing of divine beings in addition to God is of course polytheism. So it is easy to see why the early Church found Arianism unacceptable.

If the Son is an uncreated item discrete from God, it is false that God has made all that He does not include, which flies in the face of Scripture and Creed.[12] To call Him divine, uncreated and discrete from God is to opt for a polytheism even clearer than Arianism's. But if the Son is not a creature or an uncreated item discrete from God, He is in *some* way God.[13] How then, if not by simple identity? One option here would be to say that God is always Father, but only temporarily Son, or necessarily the Father but only contingently Son. This avoids polytheism: God is in some way Son. If there are no temporary or contingent identities, it is consistent with denying (2). But of course it leaves us the question of just what God's relation to the Son is. The clearest account of this seems to be Modalism: the being who is always, necessarily the Father, contingently and temporarily takes on a second role, as Son, in such a way that (so to speak) when the Son was on earth, nobody was home in heaven, and the Father counts as crucified. Modalism sits ill with Scriptural passages which seem to treat Father and Son as two separate persons, e.g. Christ's saying "I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me"

(*John* 6:38) and praying “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the creation of the world” (*John* 17:5). Such texts make it clear why the early church found Modalism unacceptable. It thus seems that LT cannot be coherent, monotheist and orthodox. I now suggest that LT can be all three, and speculate as to how it may be so.

## Time-Travel, Tap-Dancing, and the Trinity

You are at Radio City Music Hall, watching the Rockettes kick in unison. You notice that they look quite a bit alike. But (you think) they must just be made up to look that way. After all, they came on-stage at once, each from a different point backstage, they put their arms over each other's shoulders for support, smile and **(p.175)** nod to each other, and when the number is over, they scatter offstage each in her own direction. So they certainly seem to be many different women. But appearances deceive. Here is the true story. All the Rockettes but one, Jane, called in sick that morning. So Jane came to work with a time-machine her nephew had put together for the school science fair. Jane ran on-stage to her position at the left of the chorus line, linked up, kicked her way through the number, then ran off. She changed her makeup, donned a wig, then stepped into her nephew's Wells-o-matic, to emerge in the past, just before the Rockettes went on. She ran on-stage from a point just to the right of her first entry, stepped into line second from the chorus line's left, smiled and whispered a quip to the woman on her right, kicked her way through the number, then ran off. She then changed her makeup again…Can one person thus be wholly in many places at once? The short answer is: she is in many places at the same point in *our* lives, but not the same point in *hers*. If Jane travels in time, distinct segments of her life coincide with the same segment of ours. To put this another way, Jane's personal timeline intersects one point in ours repeatedly.

Now in this story, there is among all the Rockettes just one trope of human nature. All tropes of human nature in the Rockettes are identical. But consider this argument:

1a. the leftmost Rockette = Jane.
2a. the rightmost Rockette = Jane.
3a. Jane = Jane.
So
4a. the leftmost Rockette = the rightmost Rockette.

The argument appears sound, but doesn’t shorten the chorus line. There is just

one substance, Jane, in the chorus line. But there is also an extended chorus line, with many of *something* in it. Many what, one asks? Some philosophers think that Jane is a four-dimensional object, extended through time as well as space that not Jane's life but Jane herself has earlier and later parts.[14] If this is true, each Rockette is a temporal part of Jane. If (as I believe) Jane has no temporal parts, then not just a temporal part of Jane, but Jane as a whole, appears at each point in the chorus line, and what the line contains many of are segments or episodes of Jane's life-events. This may sound odd. After all, Rockettes dance. Events do not. But what you see are many dancings of one substance. What makes the line a line is the fact that these many events go on in it, in a particular set of relations. Each Rockette is Jane. But in these many events, Jane is there many times over. She plays different causal roles, once (as the leftmost Rockette) supporting the second-from-left Rockette, once (as the second-from-left) being supported by the leftmost, etc. And she has genuine interpersonal relations with herself in her other roles. She leans on herself for support, smiles to herself, talks (and talks **(p.176)** back) to herself. The talk may even be dialogue in the fullest sense. In changing makeup, wig, etc., Jane might well forget what she said when she was leftmost in the line, and so a remark she hears when she is one in from the left might well surprise her, and prompt a response she did not anticipate.[15] The Wells-o-matic lets the one Jane be present at one time many times over, in many ways, as the leftmost Rockette, the rightmost, etc. It gives us one Jane in many *personae*. If we give the name “Rockette” to what we see many of, it lets the one Jane be (or be present in) many Rockettes. The Wells-o-matic allows this by freeing the events composing Jane's life from the general order of time.

Is time-travel genuinely possible? I travel in time into the future if, with no gaps in my existence, periods of suspended animation, time spent unconscious, or subjective slowing in my experience, I find myself at a point in world-history beyond where the biological aging of my body and (say) the time on my watch would date me: if, say, I step into a machine, step out 10 seconds later by watch- and body-time, and find that it is next year. If this is an acceptable description of futureward time-travel, then the Special Theory of Relativity entails that it occurs. For the theory entails that the time of an accelerated object dilates: if we mount a sufficiently precise clock on a body A, accelerate A a while, then compare the A-clock with one which has not been accelerated, the A-clock will be found to have run more slowly. If A-time thus dilates, the A-clock travels into the future per the description above. Experiments have confirmed that time-dilation occurs.[16]

In some models of the universe consistent with General Relativity's field equations and requirements on the universe's mass-energy distribution, physical objects can travel into the past. This is reason to call pastward time-travel physically possible.[17] Paradoxes threaten stories of pastward time-travel ("suppose I went back and killed my earlier self before he got into the time-machine…"). Some think these reason to call it conceptually impossible.[18] But they may not be. According to Earman, these paradoxes

> bring out a clash between Gödelian time-travel and what might be held to be conceptual truths about spatiotemporal/causal order. But in the same way the twin paradox of special relativity theory reveals a clash between the structure of relativistic space-times and what were held to be conceptual truths about time-lapse. The special and general theories of relativity have both produced conceptual revolutions. The twin paradox and the [time-travel paradoxes] emphasize how radical these revolutions are, but they do not show that these revolutions are not sustainable or contain inherent contradictions.[19]

**(p.177)** In other words, if the physics clashes with our pre-theoretic intuitions, it may be the intuitions (and *a fortiori* philosophical theories built on them) which should give. And the paradoxes are not necessarily intractable. It would take a full paper of its own fully to motivate a solution to the time-travel paradoxes. But it would be good to say something to suggest that these can be solved, or at least come as close to solution as matters for my purposes. For I go on to model the Trinity on a time-travel case.

## Time-Travel Paradoxes

The "killing my earlier self" paradox is the most disturbing intuitively. This paradox applies to Jane: can Jane as rightmost turn and kill Jane on her left, before next-left Jane made it to the time-machine to re-emerge and take her rightmost place? A "no" answer seems untenable. Surely it's physically possible for Jane to pick up a knife on the way to her rightmost station, turn toward the next person in line, etc. But if yes, then there is a physically possible world in which Jane arrives at a point in her personal future after (it seems) having made it impossible for herself to get there. Moreover, Jane's killing her earlier self seems to generate a contradiction: Jane does travel back in time this last time, else she could not commit the murder, but if Jane does commit the murder, Jane dies before returning to the time-machine and so does not travel back in time. So if yes, it is apparently within Jane's power to make a contradiction true.

For my purposes, I need not suggest a full solution to this paradox. I want to suggest by analogy with a time-travel case that it is possible that God be a Latin Trinity. That is, I want to suggest that for all we know, this is how it is with God in some metaphysically possible world. To suggest this, I need only make out the analogy (which I have already begun to do) and make a case that there is a metaphysically possible world containing pastward time-travel. To do this last, I need only point to the physics and suggest that in some world with such a physics, the paradoxes would not arise. A full solution to the time-travel paradoxes would show in effect that time-travel is compatible with all the facts about our own world. I need not argue this, for my claim is only that a Latin doctrine of the Trinity has likenesses to something found in *some* metaphysically possible world.

Now the paradox above is that seemingly we cannot grant either that Jane can or that she cannot kill her past self. To show that there is a possible world immune from this paradox, we need only show that there is a possible world conforming to an appropriate solution to the General Relativity equations in which an analogue of one or the other claim is true. I suggest that in some such GR-world, a creature just like Jane and in her situation simply cannot kill her past self. We think that Jane can kill her past self because we think she has libertarian freedom and the physical possibility of so using it. But it is within God's power to make creatures very like us save that they lack libertarian free will, and to site them in an appropriate GR-world physically deterministic at the **(p.178)** macro-level. Suppose that God makes such a creature, Janet, and sets her in such a world which physically determines that she does not kill her past self when she emerges from a time-machine. Then there is no possible world indiscernible from Janet's up to the time at which she exits the machine in which she kills her past self. It is just not possible that she do so given these antecedents. Physical determinism and the lack of libertarian freedom can occur in an appropriate GR-world. So the “retro-suicide” paradox does not entail that pastward time-travel does not occur in any possible world. And I do not need to claim that time-travel can occur in *our* world to claim that a Latin Trinity exists in some world. For that matter, I don’t need to claim this to assert that a Latin Trinity exists in our world. For if physical indeterminism and created libertarian freedom did in fact rule time-travel out of our world, they would not also rule out a Latin Trinity. These things have no bearing at all on God's nature, since I do not claim that God travels in time, and in any case they exist only logically after God has His nature.

A second sort of paradox can be built on the first, and to this I now suggest a full solution. Suppose that rightmost-Jane knifes the next person in line. Next-left Jane, stunned and confused by the attack, picks up a knife to defend herself on the way back to the time-machine, and in her confusion attacks in the wrong direction when she emerges: she attacks herself because she was attacked. A causal "loop" runs from next-left Jane's being attacked to the attack by rightmost Jane, and so the being-attacked is in its own causal ancestry. Every event in the causal loop is fully explained causally by immediately prior events. The puzzle is that *globally*, each event seems its own full explanation—since in tracing its ancestry, we find our way around the loop to the event itself—and that since nothing can explain its own occurring, it seems that globally, each event has no full explanation at all, despite having a *local*causal explanation. Putting it another way, there seems no real reason that Jane has a knife-wound. She has it at every point in the loop due to something earlier in the loop, but there seems no answer to the question of why there is ever any time at all at which Jane has a wound.

This is a paradox, but is it an impossibility? Quantum theory suggests that we must learn to live with events with no full physical causes. "No event causes itself " looks like a necessary truth, but it doesn't rule loops out. In the loop, no event *locally* causes itself. Nor does any event *globally* cause itself. Globally—that is, taking into account all events in the loop—events in the loop are uncaused, at least physically. The loop offends against intuitions that favor principles of sufficient reason, but it is impossible only if some fairly strong PSR is a necessary truth. If one is, of course, one can run powerful arguments for the existence of God. So atheists, at least, might not wish to push this sort of objection. Of course, an atheist might Chisholm away at PSRs to produce one gerrymandered to keep both loops and God out. But such a principle would quite likely forfeit its claim on our intuitions, and so provide no real *reason* to think loops impossible. And even theists needn't push PSR objections. For given a PSR strong enough to yield God, an explanation of the entire loop's existence is available from outside the loop. It is that God brought it into existence: the reason Jane has a wound is that God brought this about, by **(p.179)** conserving the entire loop.[20] So I claim that an intuitively plausible PSR strong enough to rule loops out will rule God in. But with God ruled in, loops become compatible with the PSR after all. I conclude that the possibility of loops is an oddity, but does not rule time-travel out.

Retro-suicide and causal loops yield the strongest objections I know to the

possibility of time-travel. I suggest that the loop paradox dissolves on inspection, leaving us with an oddity that falls well short of contradiction, and that there is a possible world containing time-travel in which retro-suicide is not possible. But even if I turn out wrong about these things, Jane's story is consistent and broadly conceivable. Even if pastward time-travel is in some way impossible, we have detailed physical models of the world in which it can occur. It is physically impossible that there be frictionless planes, but talk about them—detailed physical models in which they occur—can clarify the behavior of actual physical things. More to the point, time-travel stories may have at worst the status of intuitionist logic. I hold that classical logic is true, and necessarily true. If it is, there are no intuitionist possible worlds—it is not, for instance, possible for some p that ¬¬p be true and p not be true. The distinctive theses of intuitionism state metaphysical impossibilities. But they are internally consistent, comprehensible impossibilities. We know in great detail how logic would be were they true—so to speak, we have detailed logical models of the world in which they occur. We understand intuitionist theses full well, we can reason consistently within intu-itionist strictures, and—here's the most important point—we can even appeal to intuitionist theses to clarify other things which may be metaphysically possible or even true ("if the future is indeterminate, then it is as if for some future-tensed propositions, negation behaves intuitionistically"). So even if pastward time-travel is impossible, talk about it may help us clarify other, genuinely possible things.

Further, *if* pastward time-travel is impossible, this is due to the nature of space, time, and the causal order within them: in short, because of the relations which link events located in space and time. If pastward time-travel is impossible, what pastward time-travel stories show us are relations time-bound events cannot instance because they *are* time-bound. The classic Latin Trinitarians agree that God is not in time. If He is not, then if there are such things as events in His life, they are free from temporal constraints. They need not be related as events in time are. Again, if God is in time, it does not follow that events in His life are ordered as other temporal events are. Even if they have some temporal properties, they might not have the full complement of ordinary **(p.180)** temporal properties.[21] If God's life is at least as free from ordinary temporal ordering as a pastward time-traveler's would be, it is conceivable and so may be possible that in His life, one substance is three Persons in some form of social relation—as in Jane's case one substance is (or is present in) many Rockettes. So we need not suppose that God travels in time to draw this moral: God's life may be free from time's bonds. If it is, its events may be strangely structured, and this

may be relevant to the doctrine of the Trinity.

## Events and the Trinity

There is one Jane, but she was present many times over in the chorus line. At one point in our lives, many discrete maximal episodes in her life were co-present. These episodes were discrete in that along Jane's own personal timeline, they did not overlap (they were strictly successive). These episodes were maximal in that any point during each included one event in Jane's life of which every other event occurring at that point in Jane's life was part, and at any point we could say, for a shorthand, simply that *that* event was occurring. Suppose, then, that God's life has the following peculiar structure: at any point in our lives, three discrete parts of God's life are present. But this is not because one life's successive parts appear at once. Rather, it is because God always lives His life in three discrete strands at once, no event of His life occurring in more than one strand and no strand succeeding another.[22] In one strand God lives the Father's life, in one the Son's, and in one the Spirit's. The events of each strand add up to the life of a Person.[23] The lives of the Persons add up to the life God lives *as* the three Persons. There is one God, but He is many in the events of His life, as Jane was in the chorus line: being the Son is a bit like being the leftmost Rockette.

Of course, the cases also differ. Not all of Jane's life is on display in the chorus line. But every event in God's life is part of the Father-Son-Spirit chorus line; God does not live save as Father, Son and Spirit. Jane has just one life, with a peculiar episode partway through. It does not consist of anything else that counts as an **(p.181)** entire life. God's life always consists of three other things which count as entire ongoing lives.[24] While the disruption between Jane's personal timeline and the sequence of events in ordinary public time had a special cause, God's life just naturally runs in three streams. Again, along Jane's personal timeline, first she only dances in one spot, then she runs to the machine, then she only dances in another spot. Jane dances in one spot only after she dances in another. Not so for God: God always lives in all three streams. God's life always consists of three non-overlapping lives going on at once, none after the other, as the series of positive numbers consists of two non-overlapping series, the positive rationals and irrationals, “going on at once” within the series, neither after the other.

Jane's story includes an account of how the many Rockettes are generated (the time-travel story) which involves succession. This account does not rule out Jane's existing at all times, and even having three streams of her life going at all

times. For suppose that Jane exists at all public times. Then if public time has a first and last instant, the time-machine brings it about that after Jane's life at time's last instant comes a next instant of Jane's life located at time's first instant.[25] There is no public time after public time's last instant or before its first, but in Jane's life, her personal time, there is a period after the last instant of time (one which begins Jane's life's second stream, at time's first instant) and one before public time's first instant (namely, her entire first life-stream).[26] If time has a finite length but no last instant, there is a further puzzle. Suppose that the Wells-o-matic sends Jane pastward at some particular time. If time has no last instant, there is time *after* that time. So it seems that Jane misses some of time the first time around, in which case it's not true that her first life-stream exists at all times. But suppose e.g. that there is a last full second followed by an open period not more than a second long. Then we can simply say that Jane spends all of that open **(p.182)** period in the machine, and that the machine brings it about that the first period of Jane's second life-stream succeeds the period she spent in the machine. If time has an infinite future, there is no particular problem in saying that infinite periods of Jane's life succeed one another. Such number-series as 1, 3, 5…2, 4, 6…are mathematically unproblematic. Jane's life in this case would consist of minutes paired 1:1 with the members of some such series. What's puzzling is again just when the machine sends Jane back. One way to dissolve the puzzle is just to have Jane live in the machine for all time after a particular point, and say that the machine links her time in it to her life's second stream earlier in time. It should be clear from what I've said how the time-machine scenario can handle further permutations on the length and topology of time. So talk of time-travel can even provide some model of a life which always has three streams. Jane's generation-account, again, involves succession. Whatever account we give in God's case will not. But here my point is simply that we can make some sense of there being a life so structured as to have three discrete streams going on at once, even if that life includes all of time. I do not claim that the analogy is perfect.

Some might say that what makes the time-travel story comprehensible is precisely what's missing in the Trinitarian case.[27] Parts of Jane's life *succeed* parts of Jane's life, and so we can make sense of her winding up as three dancers at once as we watch her. But Persons' lives do not succeed Persons' lives. Instead, I've said, God just always lives in three streams. So how does one better understand the Trinity *via* the time-travel analogy? In Jane's story, again, three streams of events going on at once, which initially seem like three lives, turn out to be the life of one individual. On the surface, it might seem that what makes

the story work is the succession between the life-segments. But it's more basically the causal relations between her life-segments. These are segments of one individual's life not because they succeed one another in a timeline but because the right causal relations link them. For one can imagine (borrowing an illustration from Lewis[28]) that when Jane enters the time-machine, she is annihilated and replaced by an atom-for-atom duplicate put together by the machine, with Jane existing at all times up to t in her personal timeline and the duplicate existing from Jane-time t onward. In this story, the duplicate is an "immaculate replacement" for Jane—its timeline succeeds and continues hers without a gap. But clearly the resulting life is not a further part of Jane's. Now some argue that the difference between duplicate-succession and continued existence is primitive and ultimate—that identity over time is a brute matter, not grounded in relations among the events of a life.[29] But if it is not, it rests largely on causality. The duplicate's life does not continue Jane's *inter alia*because the causal relations between the events aren't right—the positions, motion etc. of the atoms constituting Jane's body (and Jane herself, on **(p.183)** materialism) don't directly cause those of the duplicate's atoms.[30] Conversely, on materialism, it's because (*inter alia*) these atoms' present motion is caused in the right way by the immediately prior motion of the atoms in Jane's body that this person's life continues Jane's, and so this person is Jane. If Jane has a soul and continues to exist only if it does, still causation is relevant, for the same soul continues to exist only if its earlier states contribute causally to appropriate sets of its later.[31] Succession by a duplicate isn't continued existence, and so doesn't give us a case of three streams of one life going on at once, because the causal relations between the relevant streams of events aren't right. Causal relations at least help determine the identity of the substance in the differing streams of Jane's life; it's (perhaps *inter alia*) because the right causal relations link them that they are successive stages of one life, as vs. successive smoothly continuous lives of duplicate Janes. And if this is correct, it lends itself to Trinitarian use.

As causal relations between the event-streams in the Jane case help make them streams within one life, we can suppose that causal relations do the like without succession in the Trinitarian case: that is, we can suppose that causal relations between the event-streams involved are what make them all streams within one individual's life. The causal relations involved are those of the Trinitarian processions: the Father "begetting" the Son, the Father and the Son "spirating" the Spirit. Nobody has ever claimed to explain how these work, so I'm at no disadvantage if I do not either. Every Trinitarian has claimed that whatever these

relations amount to, they yield distinct Persons who are the same God. I say the same. The time-travel analogy makes this point: causal relations between streams of events going on at once and apparently involving wholly distinct individuals can make them streams of events within a single life. That point applies univocally to the Trinitarian case. Those who hold that the Son eternally proceeds from the Father hold **(p.184)** that there eternally is a causal relation between them such that the events of the Son's life and the events of the Father's are events within the life of one single God. They leave the mechanism involved a mystery. The time-travel case shows that there is some intelligible story one can put where the mystery is in a structurally similar case. This does not remove the mystery, but it domesticates it a bit: thinking about time-travel shows us that causation can do the kind of thing Trinitarians claim it does. In Jane's case, ordinary identity-preserving causal relations link events in her life as each Rockette, and the causal relation which makes what look like three individuals' lives into the lives of one individual—the one the time-machine induces—directly links only the ends of various short event-streams, not the events in the middle. The Trinitarian relations of generation directly link entire streams: every maximal event in the Father's stream has or contains a begetting relation to an appropriate event or set of events in the Son's stream. But we know of nothing that would make this impossible—*why can't* causal relations which turn what are apparently three lives into one life link more than just the end-segments of streams?

If one asks what sort of persons the Persons are, on this account, the right answer is that they are whatever sort God is—the Persons just *are* God, as the Latin approach will have it. The Persons have the same trope of deity. Numerically the same substance generates their mental episodes. Just as Jane has her own thoughts while she is the left- and rightmost Rockettes, God has His own thoughts as Father and Son. But just as Jane does not think her leftmost thoughts at the point in her life at which she is rightmost, God does not think His Father-thoughts at the points in His life at which He is Son. Just as Jane can token with truth "I am the leftmost Rockette" and "I am the rightmost," God can token with truth "I am the Father" and "I am the Son." But just as Jane cannot token both claims with truth at the same points in her life, God cannot token with truth "I am the Son" at points in His life at which He is Father.[32] Just as Jane at the leftmost spot on the chorus line has no internal access to and is not thinking the thoughts she thinks at the rightmost spot, God as Father has no internal access to and is not thinking the thoughts of God as Son.[33] So the Son is distinct from the Father as leftmost Rockette is from rightmost, and the Son's mind is distinct

from the Father's as leftmost's is from rightmost's.

On my account, the Persons' distinctness, like the Rockettes', depends on that of events involving a particular substance. Their identities are event-based; facts about events in God's life are what make Him triune. There is reason to say that at least one classic Latin account of the Trinity is in this way event-based. Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologiae* Ia account of the Trinity with questions on Persons' procession from Persons (q. 27), relations among Persons (q. 28) and finally the **(p.185)** Persons themselves (q. 29). The first claim in his positive account of procession is that "all procession is according to some action,"[34] that Persons proceed from Persons because of some divine act. The story Thomas tells of some of these acts is this.[35] God understands Himself. This is a divine act —God*does* something.[36] Because God does something, His understanding Himself is what we would call an event.[37] According to Thomas, because God understands Himself, His mind naturally generates an "understood intention," something expressing the content of His self-understanding. This is His "inner Word."[38] The coming to be of this "intention" is the Word's proceeding from the Father. Now "coming to be" suggests a process. This is misleading, as the Word is generated instantaneously and so exists co-eternal with God's self-understanding.[39] As Thomas points out, what's left when we remove this misleading implication is just an eternal relation of origin.[40] But this is a *causal* relation. And so its distal term is a caused state of affairs, the Word's existing. The obtaining of a caused state of affairs as and because it is caused is (I'd argue) an event.[41] One can call this event the Word's filiation. Because the Word proceeds, God's initial self-understanding has a relational property: it is the cause of an understood intention. Because it has this property, God's understanding Himself is also the Father's fathering the Son, His having the causal relation of paternity. For Thomas (following Augustine and Boethius), the Persons are distinguished solely by relational properties (being the Father of, being the Son of). That is, the only difference between God the Father and God the Son is that one is someone's Father (and no-one's Son) and the other is someone's Son (and no-one's Father). These relational properties are exemplified entirely because certain acts—events—take place in God's inner life (self-understanding, inner expression; fathering, filiation): this is why Thomas orders ST's Trinity treatise to move from acts to processions to relational properties, and only then to Persons. In fact, Thomas says, the relational properties' being exemplified just is the acts' taking place.[42] So what distinguishes God the Father from God the Son is simply which act God is performing. God the Father is God fathering. God the

Son is God filiating, or being fathered. The Persons simply are **(p.186)** God as in certain acts—certain events—in His inner life.[43] These events have no temporal sequence. None succeeds the other, for none are in time. As they are not in time, they have no temporal parts. God just eternally *does* the acts which constitute His life; these acts render Him triune.

Aquinas attempts to explain why God's self-understanding renders Him a Father and a Son, when our own acts of self-understanding do not do this to us.[44] But we needn't tackle this issue, at least for now.[45] One *could* suggest that it's just a primitive fact about the kind of thing God is that one stream of His life generates a second stream, and the two together generate a third stream, as it is about our kind that this does not happen to us.[46] Explanation has to stop someplace, and the doctrine of the Trinity is supposed to be in the end mysterious.

## Preserving the Persons

To be minimally acceptable, an account of the Trinity must be coherent and orthodox. So an event-based account must at least show that it can deal with (1)–(4) and the "generation" argument. On an event-based account, on one reading, (1)–(4) is sound but irrelevant. If God as the Persons is relevantly like Jane as the Rockettes, then just as (1a)–(4a) did not shorten the chorus line, (1)–(4) do not collapse the Trinity. (1a)–(4a) did not shorten the chorus line because the real force of (4a) is

> 4a*. the substance who is the leftmost Rockette = the substance who is the rightmost Rockette.

(4a*) is compatible with the sort of distinction leftmost and rightmost have. To eliminate Rockettes, one would have to infer from (1a)–(3a) not (4a) or (4a*), **(p.187)** but that the episode of Jane's life in which she is the leftmost Rockette and has not previously been any other Rockette is the last episode on her timeline in which she is any Rockette. It's obvious that (1a)–(3a) cannot by themselves yield this conclusion. The Trinitarian parallel is clear: (1)–(3) do not license the conclusion that the events (life) in which God is Father are the only events (life) in which He is any Person.

On the present view, the generation argument loses its sting. For it assigns (5) the sense

> 5a. God in the event(s) in which He is Father generates God in the event(s)

in which He is Son.

(5a) asserts something relevantly like event causation within God's life: it causally links one segment of God's life to another. This does not entail that a second God exists or that one item causes itself to exist.[47] (5a) so taken still yields (6), but also so interprets (6) as to make it harmless. And in fact, the event-causal relations involved here provide a natural hook on which to hang an account of the Persons' generation-relations.

Thus one could simply concede (and ignore) these arguments. But in fact, there is more than one way to read them. On the second reading, thinking about time-travel suggests that they are in an unusual way unsound and invalid.

## Timelines and Soundness

For an argument to be sound, all its premises must be true at once. We see all the Rockettes at once. So of course it seems to us that (1a)–(3a) are all true at once. For that matter, we tend to think all identity-statements true omnitemporally if true at all (or at least true for all time after their subjects begin to exist[48]), and so again true at once (once their subjects exist). But when Jane has gone home, nothing satisfies the description "the leftmost Rockette" (though Jane of course satisfies "the person who *was*the leftmost Rockette"). If nothing satisfies "the leftmost Rockette," the description does not refer. And if the description does not refer, (1a) is not true. If we see (1a) as omnitemporally true (or as true for all time after Jane starts to exist), this is because we treat "the leftmost Rockette" as temporally rigid, picking out Jane at all times if it picks her out at any (or all future times once it picks her out at any). But we needn't. And read as involving a temporally non-rigid description, (1a) can cease to be true. This might suggest that (1a) is not "really" an identity-statement, that at some deep level it is "really" the predication that Jane is the leftmost Rockette. I take no stand on this. What's **(p.188)** clear is that the predication can cease to be true, and on the non-rigid reading, the identity-statement is true only as long as the predication is.

With the descriptions rigid, (1a)–(4a) is sound but irrelevant: we took the descriptions as rigid in the last section. Now let us read (1a) and (2a) non-rigidly. If we do, an ambiguity emerges. (1a)–(3a) are all true at the same point in our lives. So for us, the argument is sound (though still irrelevant). But on Jane's timeline, things differ. When Jane is the leftmost Rockette, she has not yet lived through dancing in the rightmost Rockette's spot—even if she has a perfect memory, she has no memory of this. Jane then shares the stage with the

rightmost. So Jane is then living through existing simultaneously in public time with her dancing in the rightmost Rockette's spot. But still, on Jane's timeline, (2a) is not yet true, because Jane has not yet done what she must to satisfy the description “the rightmost Rockette,” even though (1a) and (2a) are true at once on *our* timeline. So too, when (2a) is true on Jane's personal timeline, (1a) has ceased to be true. Jane *recalls* dancing in the leftmost spot, and so qualifying for the title “the leftmost Rockette,” and one can only remember what has happened in one's past. Dancing as leftmost is something she *once* did but is no longer doing—on her timeline. This is so even though Jane is then living through existing simultaneously in public time with her dancing in the leftmost spot. So on Jane's personal timeline, with its premises read non-rigidly, (1a)–(4a) *is never sound*.

This suggests that there is actually a tense involved in (1a) and (2a), at least when we treat the descriptions as non-rigid. The ordinary-language sentences (1a) renders are after all “Jane is the leftmost” or “Jane is identical with the leftmost” (and so for (2a) ). In these, “is” is present-tensed. Whether non-rigid (1a) and (2a) are true at once depends on whether the present the tense brings in is Jane's own or that of the public timeline. So here is the ambiguity: the non-rigid-description reading of (1a)–(4a) is sound (though as irrelevant as the rigid reading) if the tenses invoke the public timeline, but never sound if they invoke Jane's. If pastward time-travel can occur, it's Jane's timeline that counts: that (1a)–(4a) is sound along the public timeline is irrelevant. To show why, I now sketch another problem about time-travel.

In the same period of public time, Jane does (as rightmost) and does not (as leftmost) remember exiting the stage after the leftmost Rockette danced her number. So it seems that time-travel entails a flat-out contradiction. To avoid this, the defender of time-travel must relativize Jane's remembering somehow. One option would be to relativize to different places: Jane recalls this in the rightmost but not the leftmost spot, and it is no contradiction to recall-this-in-the-rightmost-spot at t but not recall-this-in-the-leftmost-spot at t, even though it is one to recall this and not recall this at t. But this is unintuitive, it's hard to avoid the feeling that if Jane remembers in one spot then Jane remembers*simpliciter* (which re-instates the contradiction), and it isn’t sufficiently general, as it would not handle time-travelers not located in space (angels, perhaps). Another option would be to relativize to different temporal parts of Jane—the rightmost part does recall and the leftmost does not—and reject the move from **(p.189)** Jane's part's remembering then to Jane's

remembering then or else parse “Jane remembers then” strictly in terms of her temporal parts. But that Jane has temporal parts so ordered implies that Jane has a personal timeline distinct from the public timeline.[49] So if relativizing to Jane's timeline will solve the problem by itself, it's a cheaper solution: it doesn’t commit one to temporal parts. It's better, then, to relativize to Jane's timeline, i.e. to say that there's no contradiction involved in Jane's time-travel because Jane recalls and does not recall at different points in her life. But this dissolves the problem only if Jane's personal timeline takes precedence over the public timeline: that is, only if that Jane recalls P at a point in her life coinciding with public time t does not imply that Jane recalls P at t *simpliciter*. For of course, if this did follow, the original contradiction would be re-instated. Pastward time-travel is possible only if it does not involve the contradiction above. The best way to block the contradiction is to relativize Jane's recalling to her timeline. But this works only if facts about the order of segments of Jane's own life supersede facts about the public timeline—only if, as it were, Jane while time-travelling is really in her own time even though every instant of her life coincides with some instant of public time. This last is exactly what one would expect if there can be pastward time-travel, in which individual timelines break free of the public timeline.

If time-travel can occur, then that P at a point in one's life which coincides with public time t does not entail that P at t. Nor does P's being so at public t entail that P is so at every point in one's life which coincides with public t. Jane exits the stage from her leftmost position at public time t + 1. So at public time t, she has not yet made the exit, and does not remember it. As Jane exits the stage after her first dancing, her timeline has not yet diverged from public time. So if her not recalling this exit at public t, before she made it, entailed that she did not recall it at every point in her life which coincided with t, then she would both recall it and not recall it as rightmost. If time-travel can occur, then, that Jane does not at public time t recall her exit does not entail that Jane does not recall this at every point in her life which coincides with t. Not all facts about the public timeline impose themselves on the time-traveler's timeline.

There are stages of our lives at which Jane is presently both the leftmost and the rightmost Rockette. During any such stage, (1a)–(4a) is sound. But Jane's life has no such stage. For again, as we watch the Rockettes, we see all at once events that for Jane are successive, i.e. not all co-present. On her timeline, when she is presently the rightmost Rockette, being the leftmost Rockette is in her past.[50] **(p.190)** Now if time-travel can occur, facts about time-travelers’ personal

timelines supersede facts about public time. That (1a)–(3a) are all true at once in public time does not entail that they are all true at once during Jane's life, even though all segments of Jane's life coincide with public times. So if time-travel can occur, the fact that (1a)–(4a) is sound in public time does not matter. Along Jane's timeline it is wrong to treat (1a)–(4a) as a proof, even though we would be right to do so. Even if the argument were able (as it were) to shorten the chorus line, it would do so only if it were sound along Jane's timeline.

It would strengthen my overall case if I could show that what must be so if time-travel is possible is so—i.e. that for quite general reasons, personal timelines supersede public time. For the nonce I can only suggest something weaker. There is not (say I) some single substantival entity, Time, which passes at Newton's "uniform and equable rate." What we call time's passage is just a function of what events occur, and how they occur. Events compose all timelines, public and personal. So at the very least, there is no *a priori* reason that we should treat public time as having priority over personal, and able (as it were) to impose itself upon it. For both are wholes composed equally of the same basic parts. They simply arrange those parts differently, if they differ. Now in some cases, parts compose wholes only by composing larger parts of those wholes: players compose baseball leagues only by composing those leagues' teams, atoms compose walls only by composing bricks which compose walls. It is at least arguable that public time is really just the fusion of personal times—that events compose public time only by composing personal times which compose public time. If this is not just arguable but true, of course, then traits of personal times take precedence.

## Soundness and Trinitarian Timelines

In any case, the Trinitarian parallel to my treatment of Jane is clear. On my account, God's life runs in three streams. In one stream, (1) is so. In another, (2) is so. In no stream are both so. So in no stream of God's life are (1)–(4) or the generation-argument sound. For this fact to matter, pastward time-travel need not be possible—though if it is, that of course is helpful. It need only be the case that as in my treatment of the time-travel case, facts about God's personal timeline(s) supersede facts about the public timeline. I now argue that if God is atemporal, they do, while if God is temporal, it is at least coherent to maintain that they do.

If God is atemporal, as the classic Latin Trinitarians held, His life is wholly independent of time, and so the public timeline does not constrain it. Facts about the order of events in His life supersede facts about the public timeline in almost

the sense facts about Jane's timeline do. If time-travel can occur, “P at a point in one's life which coincides with public time t” does not entail “P at t,” nor *vice versa*. It's hard even to come up with a sense in which a timeless God's life would **(p.191)** coincide with times.[51]But just suppose that if God is timeless, then there is some sense in which (1) is so at a point in God's life coinciding with all times—after all, at every time, if one asserts (1), what one asserts is true. Even so, it does not follow from this that (1) is so at any t. For if God is timeless, no event in His life occurs at any time. But if (1) were the case at t, this would be because an event helping make it so occurred at t: what is true then is true then because part of what makes it so occurs then.[52] So if God is timeless, it's not true in his case that for all P, if P at a point in His life coinciding with t, then P at t. If God is timeless, then even if P is true of Him and it is now t, it is not the case that P *at t*. Instead, P is so without temporal location.

The reverse entailment, from “P at t” to “P at some point in God's life coinciding with t,” seems to fail as well if God is timeless. For at t, all and only those events before t are such that their happening is in the past. But at no point in God's life is this so. If for God anything is in the past—over, done and gone— God has a past, and so is temporal. Even if we waive this and allow that somehow, things can have happened for a timeless God, still if only *some* of time has happened for Him, then for Him, time has reached only that point—and so the rest of it lies in His future, and so He has a future and is again temporal. Moreover, if God's life does not occur in time, no facts about public time are relevant to “when” in His life claims are true. Events occur at different points in public time, but on any account of divine timelessness, they are given “all at once” for God—that is, at the same point(s) in His life. So events’ order for God differs from their order in public time—though of course God knows what their order in public time *is*.

One might think that the public timeline imposes itself on God's this way: if God is atemporal, at every moment of time t, it is timelessly so that (1) and (2). So (1) and (2) are the case at t timelessly, and so the case at one time timelessly. However, timeless facts obtain, but not at any time. So “at t, it's the case that timelessly P” does not entail “it's the case at t timelessly that P.” Further, suppose that (1) and (2) are the case at one time timelessly (whatever this might mean). This would not make (1) and (2) true at the same point in God's life. A parallel case can show this. Suppose God were temporal, but His personal time were simply a series of periods wholly discrete from our time—none before, during or after any period in our time. Then God's time would be related to ours just as the life of a timeless God would be, and it would be true that

A. for each public time of ours t, at t, somewhere in God's own time, (1) and somewhere in God's own time, (2).

**(p.192)** But (A) would not entail that (1) and (2) are true at once in God's own time. Times discrete on God's own timeline would not be collapsed into one because there is a second time to each period of which each has exactly the same temporal relation, namely none at all. If this isn't clear intuitively, consider a spatial parallel: suppose that there is a second space, consisting of points with no spatial relations at all to ours. Then (let's say)

B. for each place of ours p, it is the case at p that in the second space, both a dog and a cat are located somewhere.

But (B) does not entail that the dog and the cat occupy the same place. So if God is timeless, facts about the public timeline and about God's life's relations to it cannot supersede facts about when within God's life (1) and (2) are true. If (1) and (2) are true only in discrete parts of God's timeless life, facts about our time cannot make them true "at once."

Now if God is timeless, it is just timelessly the case that God's life has three "streams." That is, it consists of three aggregates of events each with the right internal relations to count as a single life and the right generation relations to set it off from events in the other sets.[53] If there is no temporal relation between these streams, and facts about our time cannot make them true at one time, then it is not the case that (1) and (2) are true at one time-period. But this is not enough to show that (1)–(4) and the generation argument are never sound for God. For suppose that there were neither time nor God—that there was only a three-dimensional space. If there is no time, no claims are true at one time. But surely the argument "this is a space; any space has dimensions; so this space has dimensions" would be sound. Again, plausibly mathematical truths are timeless. If so, none are true at one time. But even so, surely some mathematical arguments are sound. So the truth about soundness must be that an argument is sound only if none of its premises' being true is separate temporally or in some other relevant way from the rest's. In the case of mathematical truths, there is no relevant separation. In God's case, there is. (1) and (2) are true only in non-overlapping parts of God's life which are relevantly like temporal maximal episodes. This makes (1)'s and (2)'s being true relevantly separate, as does the parallel gap in Jane's life between (1a)'s and (2a)'s being true. The separation in Jane's case is discreteness along a private timeline. If God is timeless, the discreteness of episodes in His life is not along a timeline. But (I now suggest) it

is enough like discreteness along a timeline in its *causal* aspects for Jane's case to be relevant to God's.

In Jane's case, the separation of what occurs all at once in public time into different segments of one life is there due to causal relations among the segments. These events' causal relations make them parts of one and the same life. They also account for the events' discreteness, for they include relations events cannot bear to their own parts. Events are discrete iff they have no parts in common. If event A**(p.193)** causes all parts of event B, it follows that B and A share no parts, as no event causes the occurrence of its own proper parts, and so that A and B are discrete. By causing B, A accounts for B's existence and its having the parts it does. B's having just the parts it does establishes B's discreteness from A. So by causing B, A accounts for B's discreteness from A. Finally, these events' causal relations make them temporally ordered non-simultaneous parts of Jane's life (even though they are simultaneous parts of public time) if they include causation of a sort involving temporal precedence.

Now if a life is temporal, then if two of its segments are discrete, it follows that either one immediately succeeds the other or there is a temporal gap between them. Because of this, propositions can be true in one segment but not the other. So if a life is temporal and two of its segments are discrete, then due to this they stand in a relation which lets propositions be true in one but not the other. I now generalize from this, and say that if segments are discrete yet in one life, then due to this they stand in a relation which lets propositions be true in one but not the other, whether or not the life is temporal. I do so based on my brief rejection above of substantival time. For non-substantivalists about times, times just are sets or fusions of co-occurring events. If so, then if truths can differ at different times, they can equally differ at different sets or fusions of co-occurring events: to relativize truths to times is to relativize them to events. If relativizing to events is fine for temporal events, why would things differ for atemporal?

If this is true, then if causal relations account for the segments' discreteness and their being in one life, they also account for the fact that propositions can be true during one of these segments which are not true during the other. Nor does time play the essential role here. By starting something new of a temporal sort, A's causal powers make time pass. It's not that A places B at a later point in time and so lets B make true truths A did not. It's rather that A brings B about, and so makes things true which were not true before, and so makes B's time a later one. Facts about time are not basic but derivative. It's causation which makes the temporal facts about A and B what they are. The real story about the relations

between segments of Jane's life, the one which lets them have different properties while we watch them all at once, is causal, not temporal.

In Jane's case, all the segments occurred in one public-temporal period, but causal relations between them made them discrete segments of one life, with truths unique to each. In a timeless God's case, all the segments occur at once in the eternal present, but causal relations between them make them discrete segments of one life. Here too, then, there are truths unique to each. There is no temporal separation along a private timeline in this case. But I've suggested that it is causal, not temporal features that matter here, and in any case there is a more profound temporal disconnect, in that there are no temporal relations *at all* between the segments—only causal ones. Causation, not time, accounts for the distinctive features of Jane's case. I've claimed that the causal relations involved in Trinitarian generation are enough like those involved in time-travel that the key features of Jane's case carry over. If this is correct, arguments sound in public time need not come out sound along the "time" line of the Trinitarian lives.

**(p.194)** The remaining question, then, is whether there is some analogue to a public timeline within timeless eternity, which might make (1) and (2) true at once for God. The short answer is: there is, but it can't, any more than the fact that the many Janes all dance at once in public time can make the segments of Jane's life we see in the chorus line simultaneous in Jane's private time (which would be to collapse them all to a single segment). Causal relations between the lives of the Persons make them both discrete as lives and yet lives of one God. This is the mystery of the Trinitarian generations; I have not claimed to crack it. That there is one eternal present is the public timeline of eternity. That the events occur at one present does not eliminate the discreteness of the events whose one present this is any more than it did in Jane's case. Again: it is causal relations between events in Jane's life which both make them discrete—as effect from cause—and unite them into one individual's life, even if all these events are linked by time-travel and occurring at one present. So too, causal relations make the Persons' lives both discrete and the lives of one God, even if linked by Trinitarian generation and occurring at one eternal present. Causal relations so bind Jane-events that (1a)–(4a) fails, even if all the Rockettes kick at once in public time. So too, I suggest, causal relations among the atemporal events of an atemporal God's life block (1)–(4) even if the Persons share a single eternal present. If all of eternity is a single present and God's life has discrete parts, what follows is simply that God's life is relevantly like a time-traveler's, with discrete

parts occurring at once in such a way as to respect the discreteness of the parts. I submit, then, that if God is timeless, (1)–(4) and the generation argument are not sound on His “time” line. (1) and (2) are never true at the same points in God's life even if they share a single eternal present.

Each Rockette is Jane. But in terms of Jane's personal timeline, in the way just set out, each is not Jane*while* the others are Jane. Let “while*” be a connective relativized to a particular timeline, and making no reference to general, public time. Then Jane is not the leftmost Rockette while* she is the rightmost, though her being both coincides with the whole of the public time her number involves. In the same way, each Person is God, but God is not the Father while* He is the Son.

## What If God is Temporal?

If God is temporal, facts about His timeline might equally well supersede facts about the public timeline. A temporalist could assert that they do without argument, making it simply part of his/her particular conception of God's eternality. But some temporalists, at least, could offer an argument that this is so. For some temporalists maintain that God has made time, or that it is as it is because He is as He is: that God's being has some sort of causal priority to time's existing or having its character.[54] If either is true, then surely God gives time such **(p.195)** a nature as permits Him to exist as His nature dictates. If God determines time's nature, then even if He is temporal, if God's nature is such that His life should consist of three streams related relevantly like streams of a time-traveler's life, nothing in the nature of time will preclude this.

## Sortals and Soundness

No infant is a man. But Lincoln was infant and man: “that infant” and “that man” picked Lincoln out at different points in his life. Now consider this argument:

7. that infant = Lincoln,
8. that man = Lincoln,
9. Lincoln = Lincoln,

and so

10. that infant = that man.

Taking the descriptions as temporally rigid, the argument is sound, but of course does not prove that someone is both infant and man at once. Taking the

descriptions non-rigidly, (7) ceases to be true when Lincoln ceases to be an infant, well before Lincoln is an adult. So the argument is never sound. One might think (10) true even so. But more precisely, what's true is that the person who was that infant = the person who is that man. Strictly speaking, reading the descriptions non-rigidly, (10) is false. For an identity statement is true only if the terms flanking "=" refer to the same item at once, and if we take them non-rigidly, "that infant" and "that man" never refer to the same item at once:[55] nothing is a man while* it is an infant. Let me now introduce a technical term, "phased sortal."[56] "Infant" and "man" are phased sortals: they pick out a substance under a description which essentially involves a particular phase of its life. Identity-statements linking temporally non-rigid descriptions involving mutually exclusive phased sortals cannot be true. So with the descriptions non-rigid, (7)–(10) is not only never sound but has a false conclusion.

In the Rockette case, "the leftmost Rockette" and "the rightmost Rockette" act as mutually exclusive phased sortals picking out Jane, if we're dealing only with Jane's own timeline. So too, on the account of the Trinity I've been suggesting, "Father" and "Son" are mutually exclusive phased sortals picking out God. (1) and (2) are never true at once*: God is not Father while* He is Son. And (4), like (10), cannot be true—though it is of course true that while* God is the Son, God is the God who is also the Father.

## (p.196) Trinitarian Lives and Validity

Once temporary identities enter the picture, identity-statements are implicitly relativized to times (or something time-like). If so, then if we let "t"s refer to times on Jane's timeline, with the descriptions read non-rigidly, we really have

1b. $(t_1 \rightarrow t_2)$(Jane = the leftmost Rockette),
2b. $(t_3 (t_2 \rightarrow t_4))$(Jane = the rightmost Rockette), and
3b. (t) (Jane = Jane).

(1b)–(3b) are all true. But what I now argue suggests that the move from them to (4a) is invalid.

Here is an argument philosophers have discussed at length:[57]

11. Necessarily, 9 is greater than 7.
12. 9 = the number of the planets. So
13. Necessarily, the number of the planets is greater than 7.

The premises are true, yet the conclusion is false, since there could have been just 6 planets. So obviously, something goes wrong here.

(11) asserts of 9 that it has a property, being greater than 7, in all possible worlds. (12) is true, but not in all possible worlds. “9” and “the number of the planets” actually refer to the same number. But they need not have. Neptune and Pluto might never have formed, or might have formed but never been caught by the Sun's gravity. So it could have been the case that there were just seven planets. If it had, “9” and “the number of the planets” would not have had the same referent. So it is possible that “9” and “the number of the planets” do not refer to the same number. (13) asserts in effect that “the number of the planets” picks out a number larger than 7 in every possible world. But as we have seen, this is not true. So this inference from necessarily Fx and*x*= y to necessarily Fy is invalid. One moral one might draw from this is that in a modal context (i.e. within the scope of “necessarily”), the fact that two terms “a” and “b” actually refer to the same thing (i.e. that an identity-statement like (12) is true) does not suffice to warrant substituting “b” for “a.” What is required instead to have a valid inference (one which cannot take us from true premises to a false conclusion) is that “a” and “b” refer to the same thing in every possible world. For consider by contrast

11. Necessarily, 9 is greater than 7.
12a. $9 = 3^2$. So
13a. Necessarily, $3^2$ is greater than 7.

“9” and “$3^2$” refer to the same thing in every possible world. And thus both premises and conclusion are true.

**(p.197)** Times are like possible worlds—both are items at which propositions can be true—and temporal contexts can be like modal contexts. Consider this argument:

11b. 9 is always greater than 7.
12. 9 = the number of the planets. So
13b. The number of the planets is always greater than 7.

Here we go astray as in (11)–(13). For not all the planets formed simultaneously, our sun existed before it had any planets, and the universe existed even before our sun did: (13b) is false. To see why we went astray, let us parse the argument a bit more perspicuously, as involving a temporal operator which quantifies over

times as "□" does over possible worlds:

11c. At all times (9 is greater than 7).
12. 9 = the number of the planets. So
13c. At all times (the number of the planets is greater than 7).

The problem is that while (12) is true, it is not true at all times. As the problem parallels that above, one can draw a parallel moral. In a universal-temporal context, even if "a" and "b" now refer to the same thing, it is valid to substitute "a" for "b" only if "a" and "b" always (i.e. at all times) refer to the same thing. This explains the invalidity of the move from (1b)–(3b) to (4a).

I now suggest that the identities in (1) and (2) do not license the universal inter-substitution of terms denoting the one God—that is, that the move from (1), (2) and (5) to (6) is invalid. To move from Jane's case to the Trinity, we need just note that on non-substantival theories of time, times just *are* sets or mereological fusions of events.[58] So if it makes sense to index propositions to times (i.e. treat times as items at which propositions can be true), it can also make sense to index propositions to sets or fusions of events. This (I now submit) is what we must do on the present account of the Trinity. On this account, whether or not God is temporal, there are items *like* times in God's life—sets or fusions of events in God's life at which propositions are true. These are the sets or fusions of just the events of each Person's life.

The generation argument, again, moves from

1. the Father = God
2. the Son = God, and
5. the Father generates the Son,

to

6. God generates God

**(p.198)** (5) is true at all Trinitarian lives: it is the Trinitarian equivalent of a necessary or omnitemporal truth. But (1) and (2) are like (12). As (12) is true only at some possible worlds and times, (1) and (2) are each true only at some Trinitarian lives. So though (1) and (2) are true, they do not make it valid to substitute "God" for "the Father" and "the Son" in (5), for reasons akin to those operative in the modal and temporal arguments above. The basic point of the Rockette analogy is that one should approach the Trinity by asking in what ways God's life is free from ordinary temporal relations. I suggest that it is free enough from ordinary temporal ordering that we can say that God lives His life in three

streams at once, index Trinitarian truths to appropriate sets of events, then use this indexing to block the move to (6). Of course, one can also block the move to (4) this way.

## The Menace of Modalism

Accounts of the Trinity must skirt the Scylla of tri-theism and the Charybdis of modalism. Tri-theists so emphasize the separateness of the Persons as to wind up affirming three separate Gods, not three Persons in one God. Modalists so emphasize the unity of God as to wind up affirming one God who has three modes of appearing or of dealing with us, not one God in three Persons. Or so we think. It is no easy thing to say just what Modalism *was*, or exactly why it was rejected, as the Church Fathers who fought it seem to have suppressed all copies of the works they deemed heretical. Still, scholars have pieced together some sense of it from quotes, allusions and (perhaps biased) descriptions which survive in non-Modalist works, and at least on the depictions of Modalism one finds in standard theological dictionaries, my account seems comfortably far from it.[59] Such works describe Modalism as holding that all distinctions between Persons are impermanent and transitory,[60] or "are a mere succession of modes or operations,"[61] that

> the one God becomes Trinitarian only in respect of the modes of His operation *ad extra*,[62]

that

> God is three only with respect to the modes of His action in the world,[63]

**(p.199)** that

> the one God…has three manners (modes) of appearance, rather than being one God in three Persons.[64]

and that for Modalism,

> the three Persons are assigned the status of modes or manifestations of the one divine being: the one God is substantial, the three differentiations adjectival…the Modalist God metamorphosed Himself to meet the changing needs of the world,[65]

and so there is

> a Trinity of manifestation, not even a Trinity of economy, still less a Trinity of being.[66]

Nothing in my account of the Trinity precludes saying that the Persons' distinction is an eternal, necessary, non-successive and intrinsic feature of God's life, one which would be there even if there were no creatures. If one asserts all this, one asserts a "Trinity of being," with no reference to actions*ad extra* or appearances to creatures. Further items on an anti-Modalist checklist: does the view set out here entail that the Father is crucified? No, though the God who is the Father is crucified—at the point in His life at which He is not the Father, but the Son. Can the view deal adequately with the anti-Modalist texts cited above? On the present view, the Son cannot token truly "I am the Father," though He can token truly "I am the God who is (at another point in His life) the Father." Nor can the Son say truly that

> 14. I am at one point in my life the Father and at another the Son,

since at no point in the Son's life is He the Father. The Son can say truly that

> 15. I am the God who is at one point in His life the Father and at another the Son,

i.e. that He is God, and God is both Father and Son. But this is so on any Latin view of the Trinity. A natural question here is, "if the Son just is God, can't the Son use 'I' to refer to God, not to the Son, and if He does, can't He assert (14) truly?" But if the Son so uses "I," what He asserts is in effect (15), not (14). On any Latin approach, for a tri-personal God, "I" cannot be purely referential, a term whose contribution to the content of a sentence is simply an individual to whom God refers. For if there is just one individual, God, in the three Persons, then a purely referential "I" would always contribute simply God to a sentence's content. No Person could speak as "I" and refer to Himself as a Person; the Son could not say with truth, "I am not the Father," for His "I" would refer to God, and God is the Father. So on any Latin approach, if Persons can speak as themselves, and the **(p.200)** Son can know that He is not the Father, God's "I" always includes a mode of presentation, a sense under which the speaker conceives and refers to Himself. When the Son speaks as the Son, He presents Himself to Himself as the Son, and so the Father is never other than another "I," who as such has His own mind and will. This is enough to make adequate sense of the texts, given the way my view guarantees the real distinctness of Father and Son.[67] And this is why if the Son uses "I" to refer to God, what He asserts

comes out as (15): the “I”'s mode of presentation builds “the God” etc. into the content of His claim.

The question is sure to come, though: aren’t your Persons still “modes,” if not modes of appearance, “adjectival” rather than “substantial”? One reply is that on the present account, each Person is as substantial as the one God is, since each Person is God in a different “part” of His life. If an infant isn’t a mode of a substance, neither is a Son. Again, arguably a person could be a substance despite having identity-conditions that depend on events: Locke, for instance, rested the identity-conditions for persons on certain relations among mental events, and while he has of late been charged with many things, turning persons into events, accidents or modes has not been among them. Most latter-day Lockeans see persons as substances which are also material objects, or at least supervenient on them.

God's life is not constrained by time. If it is at least as free from time's bonds as a pastward time-traveler's would be, this provides a way to make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity—orthodox sense, or so I’ve argued. Note that in this last statement, pastward time-travel serves only as a model for the Trinity. While I have used pastward time-travel as a model, my view is not hostage to whether such travel is possible. My account is metaphysically possible if pastward time-travel is, and I have in fact suggested that time-travel is possible. If time-travel is not, my account is still at least as conceivable as time-travel is, and the impossibility of time-travel may not count against my account's possibility, even as the impossibility of intuitionist logic does not count against the possibility of an indeterminate future. There is more to say here—in particular, about *why* God is a Trinity, and what sort of persons Persons are. But this will have to do for now.[68]

Notes:

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(1) *The Book of Common Prayer* (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1979), 864–5.

(2) Others start from the threeness of the Persons, and try to say just how three Persons can be one God. I discuss these in “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, eds., *The Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–48 [=this vol., Ch. 4].

(3) LT's partisans up to Scotus all accept a strong doctrine of divine simplicity. So while they acknowledge that Father and Son stand in the generative relations of paternity and filiation, they deny that these relations are *constituents* of the Persons. Aquinas, for instance, asserts that the Father is identical with the relation of paternity just as God is with the divine nature, deity *(ST* 1a 29, 4). While divine simplicity no longer commands the wide assent it did, we would still not incline to see relations as constituents of particulars standing in them—save on "bundle" theories of substance, which few now favor.

(4) *Common Prayer,* 865. So also Barth: "in…the inner movement of the begetting of the Father, the being begotten of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from both…God is once and again and a third time" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II: 1, tr. G. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 615). At the back of this is of course John 1:1, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If the Word is God and is with God, God is with God—and so (it seems) we have God twice over.

(5) Quoted in Cornelius Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in Cornelius Plantinga and Ronald Feenstra, eds., *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 21.

(6) S. Thomae de Aquino *Summa Theologiae* la (Ottawa: Studii Generalis, 1941) 39, 5 *ad* 2, 245a. My translation. See also Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 103.

(7) For Thomas, talk of tropes is not strictly appropriate here, since in fact God is identical with the divine nature (so e.g. Aquinas, ST 1a 3, 3). For the nonce this need not concern us.

(8) Plantinga, "Social Trinity," 40.

(9) A common constituent of three things which never existed save as included in one of them might to philosophers seem a fourth thing in addition to any of the three though included in all. But the language of the New Testament sits ill with this. References to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "God the Father," or to God simply as Father, are too numerous to list. These would not be appropriate if God were something like a part of the Father. Again, according to *John* 1:1, the Word *was* God. This does not suggest that God was part of the Word.

(10) Henceforth I will not discuss the Spirit where the points to be made exactly

parallel those made about the Son.

(11) So e.g. *John* 1:1 and 20:28; *Romans* 9:5; *I Corinthians* 16:22; *I John* 5:20.

(12) So e.g. *Isaiah* 44:24 “I am the Lord, who has made all things,” *Romans* 11:36: “from Him and through Him…are all things,” and the Nicene Creed's statement that orthodox Christians believe in “one God…creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible” (*Common Prayer*, 358) (putative uncreated items presumably are visible or invisible).

(13) There is one other alternative, that the son be divine, uncreated, and distinct but not discrete from God. If the son is not discrete from God, the son overlaps God. If he overlaps God but is distinct from God, either (a) God has a constituent the son lacks, but every constituent of the son is a constituent of God, or (b) the son has a constituent God lacks, but every constituent of God is a constituent of the son, or (c) God and the son share a constituent but each also has a constituent the other lacks, or (d) they overlap despite sharing no constituents. Or (a) the son is part of God: God is a whole composed of persons. As parts are basic and wholes derived on (a) the three are basic, the one derived; (a) is not a version of LT. (b) was rejected in n. 9. (c) is a form of polytheism. (d) would assert a primitive constitution relation between God and the son. I am skeptical that there is such a relation.

(14) So e.g. Mark Heller, *The Ontology of Physical Objects* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

(15) Even if Jane later in her life knows what Jane earlier in her life is going to say to her, this need not unfit the analogy for Trinitarian purposes. It is hard to see how one Person could surprise another.

(16) See e.g. Edwin Taylor and John Wheeler, *Spacetime Physics* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1963), 89, and J. Hafele and Richard Keating, “Around-the-world Atomic Clocks: Predicted Relativistic Time Gains and Observed Relativistic Time Gains,” *Science* 177 (1972), 166–70.

(17) So John Earman, “Recent Work on Time Travel,” in Steven Savitt, ed., *Time's Arrows Today* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 268–310.

(18) So e.g. Richard Swinburne, *Space and Time* (N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1968), 169.

(19) Earman, “Recent Work,” 281.

(20) This doesn’t take away Jane's agency or freedom. For both can figure in every local explanation along the loop. That divine conservation is compatible with creaturely agency and freedom is non-negotiable for Western theists. Arguably conservation differs from creation only in that we call the same divine action creation when what God causes begins to exist and conservation when it continues to exist (so e.g. Scotus, *Quodlibet* 12). If this is true, the compatibility of creation and libertarian freedom/agency is equally non-negotiable, and I could as easily have spoken of God as creating the loop.

(21) Keith Ward speculates that a temporal God may be free from the usual temporal ordering(*Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (N.Y.: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 164–70); Philip Quinn advances the same notion in some detail in unpublished comments given at the 1993 APA Central Division meeting. Swinburne (*Christian God*, 137–44) and Alan Padgett (*God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1992) ) suggest His freedom from other aspects of time.

(22) In saying this I use an ordinary, intuitive concept of an event. On some theories of events (e.g. Kim's), such things as God's being divine and God's being omniscient count as events. (For Kim's theory, see Jaegwon Kim, “Events as Property-Exemplifications,” in Douglas Walton and Myles Brand, eds.,*Action Theory* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), 159–77.) If you hold such a view, modify this claim to: the strands have in common only those events involved in God's bare existence and having His nature, not any events composing His conscious life or involving His agency. Any other modifications to accommodate theories of events would not (I think) affect the basics of the view I am setting forth.

(23) For now I do not take up just what makes this so.

(24) If we are reincarnated, we have lives which consist of other items which count as complete lives. So the Trinitarian claim is at least as coherent as belief in this sort of reincarnation.

(25) If so, Jane's life fails to be continuous. It is not even dense, as there is no time, public or Jane-private, between Jane's life at public time's last instant and her life's next instant. On the other hand, there is no temporal *gap* between Jane at the last instant and Jane's next either. If Jane's life always has three segments ongoing, then it consists of three discrete segments with zero duration between them. In that sense, the segments’ endpoints are closer together than any two points in a continuous stretch of time. No qualms about Jane's identity between

time's last instant and her next ought to arise, then. If we found that time was universally discrete in the small, consisting of chronons (as some have argued), we would not conclude that no-one is identical over any long duration. We would adjust our account of identity over time to allow for this, speaking of not-quite-continuous duration where we used to speak of continuous. We can do the like for Jane.

(26) In principle then, as a referee pointed out, Jane could live an infinite life by looping back endlessly through a finite period of public time. (She'd need infinite space to do this, as otherwise she would eventually run out of room—the whole universe would be filled with nothing but time-travelling Janes. But there's no reason to think infinite space impossible.) But this does not entail that public time is infinite. Its properties arise out of the properties of all personal/private times. Even given Jane's peculiar life, all personal times might have the following trait: either they end no later than a particular instant—say, the Big Crunch—or they continue through that instant to some instant which as of the Big Crunch has already been occupied.

(27) An anonymous referee raised this.

(28) David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel," in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, v. 2 (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 73.

(29) So e.g. Trenton Merricks, "There Are No Criteria of Identity," *Nous* 32 (1998), 106–24.

(30) It's not enough to have Jane that the atoms making her up at t be those which made her up just prior to t. There is also a causal condition, that her atoms be moving in ways their prior motion directly accounts for. A Star Trek transporter beam story can make this clear. One can suppose the beam to work by disassembling us into our constituent atoms, accelerating these to a destination, then rebuilding someone looking just like us from them there. Most people, given this description, will think of the transporter as a way to get killed, not a way to be transported: we do not survive being smashed into our constituent atoms, even if something is rebuilt from them later which looks like us. Now let's modify the case: suppose the disassembly is literally instantaneous, and the transporter sends one's atoms to their destination so fast that there is no time between our standing here whole and something looking just like us standing there whole at the destination. I suggest that even so, our intuition that we don't survive the process doesn't change. For what matters here is our belief

that we don’t survive being disassembled into atoms, not any fact about how fast the bits are reassembled. Disassembly and smashing are precisely situations in which there is massive interference with the movements our atoms would otherwise be making, and given the intervention of the beam, the positions, motion etc. of Jane's atoms prior to teleportation don’t directly cause those of the duplicate's atoms at the destination point. So (I claim) the transporter story supports the text's claim that it defeats a claim of continued existence that the positions, motion etc. of the atoms constituting Jane's body don’t directly cause those of the duplicate's atoms.

(31) The causation here is “immanent,” not “transeunt.” See Dean Zimmerman, “Immanent Causation,”*Philosophical Perspectives* 11 (1997), 433–71.

(32) When Jane is the rightmost Rockette, she *used to be* the leftmost, even though she is rightmost and leftmost during the same period of public time. So strictly, she could say both that she is and that she used to be the leftmost, depending on whether she tensed the verbs to the public or to her personal timeline. But as we see in greater detail below, if time-travel is possible, the personal timeline takes precedence. I suggest below that something similar holds in the Trinitarian case.

(33) Even if the Father reads the Son's mind, He reads it “from without.”

(34) Aquinas, ST Ia 27, 1, 182a2–3.

(35) Thomas’ story about the Spirit's proceeding is the same in all respects that matter to my point. So I needn’t go into it here.

(36) As Thomas sees it, this act is by nature rather than choice (ST 1a 41, 2). But that it is not in all respects free does not entail that it is not something God does. Even coerced acts are acts.

(37) Though as Eleonore Stump pointed out to me, Thomas likely does not have a single concept that does the work of our event-concept.

(38) *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 11.

(39) *Ibid*.

(40) ST 1a 41, 1 ad 2.

(41) Some would rejoin: for Thomas, the Word's existing, caused or not, is

atemporal (ST 1a 10, 1 *et* 4). So it can’t count as an event. Well, if that's right, a timeless God can’t act, either. For a case that a timeless God can, see my *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 291–7. For a more general case in favor of non-temporal events, see my “The Eternal Present,” in Gregory Ganssle and David Woodruff, eds., *God and Time* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–48. In any case, that Thomas believes that some acts are atemporal is irrelevant to the fact that his Trinity-account is act-based, and so event-based.

(42) *Ibid*. [ST 1a 41, 1 *ad* 2.]

(43) Actually, things get a bit more complex than this. Due to the impact of his doctrine of divine simplicity, there are really two accounts of the Trinity in Thomas. I’ve given one; in the other, it might be better to say that the Persons *are* events in God's inner life.

(44) See e.g. *Compendium of Theology* I, 41. The explanation has a surprising feature: while we might think the doctrine of divine simplicity a hindrance to the doctrine of the Trinity (how can a simple God contain Triune complexity?), Aquinas argues that the reason God is a Trinity and we are not is precisely that God is simple and we are not.

(45) Here is at least a gesture at a different explanation. Suppose that as Aquinas thought, there are just three discrete maximal episodes in God's life: three events such that everything God does, thinks or experiences is part of just one of these. Then if God is timeless, these events are somehow all *there,*timelessly They do not cease to occur. Neither does one take another's place. Yet as they are discrete, they do not overlap: one does not occur *within* another. What there timelessly is to the reality of God, then, is God in one episode, and in the second, and in the third. God might differ from episode to episode, as Father differs from Son. As events are natural causal relata, it would not be surprising if (say) God in one episode had causal relations He did not have in others, e.g. becoming incarnate in just one episode. Perhaps, in short, God's timelessness plus an assumption about God's life can generate a Latin Trinity–*given* the tenability of the notion of an atemporal event.

(46) This is of course the pattern of generation-relations Western Christians posit between the Persons.

(47) Thus it is a case of immanent, not transeunt causality.

(48) But even here, one has to wonder. Is it really still true that Lincoln = Lincoln? “Lincoln = Lincoln” is after all a more precise rendering of “Lincoln is Lincoln.” The latter is present-tensed. Perhaps if Lincoln no longer exists, nobody has any longer the property of identity with Lincoln.

(49) If Jane had just one temporal part at public time t, she would be like the rest of us. Her personal timeline would not diverge from public time at t. If Jane has distinct temporal parts at public t, then one of them is in the other's past along Jane's timeline. But along the public timeline, whatever is at t when t is present is present. So if Jane has distinct temporal parts at public t, her timeline diverges from that of public time.

(50) Another angle on the same fact: on Jane's timeline, there are times between the leftmost and the rightmost Rockettes’ arrivals onstage. There are none in our timeline—for us, all Rockettes step onstage from backstage at once.

(51) Stump and Kretzmann's ET-simultaneity is one attempt (Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429–58).

(52) If P is present-tense and true, an improper part of its truthmaker is at t. If P is past-tensed and true, a proper part is: that Casesar crossed the Rubicon is true due to an event now over (the crossing) and one now going on, which makes it later now than the crossing and so makes it correct to use the past tense. The life is so if P is future-tense and true. If God is timeless, “God knows that 2 + 2 ¼ 4” has no temporal tense at all. Its truthmaker thus lies entirely outside time.

(53) Talk of atemporal events may cause pain here; see *ops. cit.* n. [41].

(54) See e.g. William Craig, “Timelessness and Omnitemporality,” and Alan Padgett, “God the Lord of Time,” in Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time* (Wheaton, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

(55) How about “remember that infant I pointed out to you years ago? That man over there, the President, is that infant”? This is loose speech for “that man *was* that infant,” i.e. “the person who is that man was that infant.”

(56) See e.g. David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 24 ff.

(57) *Its locus classicus* is W. V. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1961), 147–8.

(58) Such theories face a variety of philosophical problems. Many can be treated along lines laid out inGraeme Forbes, “Time, Events and Modality,” in Robin Le Poidevin and Murray MacBeath, eds., *The Philosophy of Time* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1993), 80–95, and Jan Cover, “Reference, Modality and Relational Time,” *Philosophical Studies* 70 (1993), 251–77.

(59) The more extended account one finds in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1978), rev. ed., 119–26, merely validates the briefer dictionary descriptions quoted below.

(60) F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1097.

(61) *Ibid*., 1102, in an account of Patripassionism, which overlapped Modalism.

(62) Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1981), 312.

(63) J. Komonchak, M. Collins, D. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 668.

(64) Donald McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Pres, 1996), 176.

(65) H. E. W. Turner, “Modalism,” in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1983), 375.

(66) *Ibid*.

(67) In the *John* 17 text cited, the Son prays to the Father. This is like one Rockette's talking to another.

(68) My thanks to Jeff Brower, Paul Reasoner, Eleonore Stump, Dale Tuggy, Dean Zimmerman and an anonymous referee for comments.

# Latin Trinitarianism: Some Conceptual and Historical Considerations

**Richard Cross**

In an influential series of articles, Brian Leftow, under the ensign “Latin Trinitarianism,” has forcefully argued against the desirability and even orthodoxy of Social Trinitarianism.[1] Why “Latin”? Leftow's answer is clear:

> Some explanations [of the odd Trinitarian arithmetic] begin from the oneness of God, and try to explain just how one God can be three divine Persons. As Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas pursued this project, let us call it Latin Trinitarianism.[2]

“Latin,” then, but as opposed to what? An obvious answer is “Greek,” and this in turn might be thought to suggest that there is, historically, another tradition too, a Greek one, perhaps more amenable to Social Trinitarianism. Indeed, this is precisely what some of Leftow's Social opponents affirm:

> Two different categories of analogy have always been used for the eternal life of the Trinity: the category of the individual person, and the category of community. Ever since Augustine's development of the psychological doctrine of the Trinity, the first has taken precedence in the West; whereas the Cappadocian Fathers and Orthodox theologians, down to the present day, employ the second category. They incline towards an emphatically social doctrine of the Trinity and criticize the modalistic tendencies in the Western Church. The image of the family is a favourite one for the unity of the Triunity: three Persons – one family.…The divine image is not the individual; it is person with person: Adam and Eve – or, as Gregory of Nazianzus declared, Adam and Eve and Seth – are, dissimilar though they are, an earthly image and parable of the Trinity.[3]

Recent research into the early history of the doctrine of the Trinity has largely overturned this analysis, arguing that the distance between Greek and Latin views **(p.202)** is by no means as great as some past scholarship has suggested.[4] So it is a useful historical exercise to see how well the Greek tradition can measure up against the requirements (rather stringent, as we shall see) that Leftow places on Latin Trinitarianism, for it would indeed be curious if Greek theologians turned out to satisfy these requirements, and thus be, in Leftow's

sense, Latin Trinitarians too. But that this is the case – that some Greek theologians turn out to be “Latin Trinitarians” too – is exactly what I will argue in this essay. This suggests, at the very least, that the “Latin Trinitarianism” moniker is misleading: and misleading in a way that may unintentionally offend theologians from non-Latin traditions (just as my somewhat tongue-in-cheek claim that some Greek theologians turn out to be “Latin Trinitarians” could similarly be thought to misrepresent the issue: though it should not if we recall that “Latin Trinitarian” is a technical term for Leftow, and one whose appropriateness it is my precise aim here to dispute). But I hope that my efforts here will help to reinforce the widespread movement towards a *rapprochement* in readings of Greek and Latin theologians.[5] The Greek theologian whose work I consider here is Gregory of Nyssa, perhaps *par excellence* **(p.203)** the Greek exponent of the Trinity: and hence, if such there be, of Greek Trinitarianism. I begin with an account of Latin Trinitarianism, as understood by Leftow, along with some preliminary comments on Gregory's Trinitarianism, and then consider Gregory's views in more detail, focusing on *Contra Eunomium* (particularly book 2 of that work), where Gregory makes explicit some of his crucial beliefs about divine simplicity in relation to the Trinity.

## Some Preliminaries

In spelling out precisely what the requirements for Latin Trinitarianism are, Leftow considers two cases: the deity or divine nature could be a trope, or it could be a universal. In the first case, according to Leftow, we would want to say on Latin Trinitarianism that

> natures are what we now call tropes. A trope is an individualized case ofan attribute…. While Cain's humanity ≠ Abel's humanity, the Father's deity = the Son's deity = God's deity. But bearers individuate tropes. If the Father's deity is God's, this is because the Father in some way *just is*God.…And God's deity, and so God, is repeated in the Son.…One God thrice repeated is still just one God.[6]

Leftow analyses the second case as follows:

> Immanent universals are single items literally present as a whole in many bearers: if humanity is an immanent universal, humanity = Moses's humanity = Aaron's humanity. So too, trivially, the Father's deity = the Son's deity. But on the Latin view, it will in addition be the case that the Father's having deity = the Son's having deity. For both are at bottom just

> God's having deity, and God's having deity, a state of affairs…is thrice repeated in the Trinity.[7]

As Leftow understands it, the Latin view can be explicated in either of these two ways, but he notes that Aquinas, reasonably taken as the definitive representative of the Latin tradition, accepts roughly the first way of proceeding.[8] In fact, Leftow proposes an immediate clarification that pushes against identifying Aquinas as a straightforward adherent of the trope account:

> The Latinists mentioned held to a strong doctrine of divine simplicity…, taking God to be identical to his essence, deity. Aquinas takes [the doctrine of divine simplicity] to imply that God is neither abstract nor concrete, neither universal nor particular.[9]

Underlying this account of divine simplicity is a view that there are no real distinctions between any of God's attributes, or, indeed, between God and any of his attributes. Aquinas maintains that "God is his deity, his life, and anything else which is thus predicated of God."[10]

**(p.204)** Now, I have argued elsewhere that Gregory of Nyssa's view is most akin to one which would take the divine nature to be an immanent universal, and I shall presuppose that conclusion, which seems to me reasonably secure, here, though not a great deal turns on this.[11] It is worth here drawing attention to a feature of Gregory's account that immediately brings him close to the view that Aquinas later holds. Aquinas supports the claim that God is neither abstract nor concrete by drawing attention to the fact that we can properly use both concrete and abstract terms of God: we use concrete terms "to signify his subsistence," and abstract terms "to signify his simplicity," such that the different abstract nouns we employ "are to be referred to the diversity which is in the understanding of our intellect, and not to any diversity in reality."[12] What Aquinas means, simply enough, is that there are no distinctions between the divine attributes that are not simply mind-imposed. Although Gregory claims that deity is a universal, he still holds that it is properly referred to by a concrete noun – "God" – which seems to signal some sort of understanding of the Janus-like status of the divine nature, neither really concrete nor really abstract.[13] And this seems to be an element in a doctrine of divine simplicity, one that turns out to be defended vigorously by Gregory too.

I do not want to pursue further here the particular line of argument – that

Gregory might be read as holding that the divine nature is neither abstract nor concrete – partly because Gregory's comments on the topic are so philosophically inchoate that it is hard to reconstruct plausibly just what he is trying to say, and partly because some relevant related considerations will become clear almost immediately below. I want to focus rather on the way in which Leftow spells out the requirements for Latin Trinitarianism on the assumption that the divine nature is some sort of universal – a position that Gregory, as I claim, espouses, despite his tendency to want to refer to the deity by the concrete noun "God." On this picture, the crucial claim is the following: "The Father's having deity = the Son's having deity. For both are at bottom just God's having deity." Now, none of the ancient and medieval thinkers I consider here would accept that there are states of affairs, and so they would not think of the matter in just the way Leftow expresses it. But they would make some analogous claims. They would hold that each person has two constituents: the divine essence, and a causal relation to the other two divine persons. But relations do not count as items in the world over and above the things related – to this extent, relations are mind-imposed. So the only real constituent of any divine person is just the divine essence. Traditional usage, as we shall see, would claim that we could talk about real identity between each person and the deity, though if we understand identity in Leibnizian terms we will be led astray by this usage. What thinkers who talk of real identity in this context are trying to draw attention to is the fact that the essence is the only real constituent of each divine person, and that the essence is numerically identical in each divine person. This **(p.205)** immediately gives us the *tertium quid* or Janus-like view of the divine nature outlined above. The divine nature is a very unusual kind of universal, since it turns out to be such that the only distinction between itself and its instances (namely, the divine persons) is relational.

Aquinas certainly accepts this view. He holds that each person includes a proper relation (not shared by the other persons) that is somehow distinct from the essence:

> In God, the essence is not really distinct from the persons (*non sit aliud essentia quam persona secundum rem*).…But when the relation is compared to the essence, it differs not really but merely rationally.[14]

The idea is that relations are not real entities or things in the world, and to this extent we might think of the distinction between the essence and a divine person as mind-imposed. But despite this fact, the relations are robust enough to distinguish related real things even in the case that the two things possess exactly

the same real constituents: e.g. it is possible for two items *x* and *y* to be distinct merely in virtue of their possessing distinct relations, even though neither of the relations counts as a real thing in the world. There are two controversial claims here: first, that relations are not real things in the world, and secondly that two things could be distinct *merely* by such relations – as on the proposed picture here. But, historically, both of these are components of the traditional way of spelling out Latin Trinitarianism, so I shall ignore the fact that the claims are *conceptually* controversial. Admittedly, this traditional understanding is not the only way of spelling out Leftow's description of Latin Trinitarianism, but it certainly is one way of trying to make sense of it, and it is one that, I shall argue, we find clearly in both Latin and Greek traditions. (We find it pervasively too, but I do not have the space to make good on this claim here. Suffice it to say that there is nothing historically controversial about it.)

All this gives us two sorts of simplicity claim: first, that there are no distinctions between the divine attributes and the divine essence; secondly, that a divine person includes no real constituent other than the divine essence. Both of these views can be found in Augustine, and certainly constitute what we might think of as classic Latin theology.[15] Thus Augustine is clear that all of God's attributes are identical with each other, and with God himself.[16] So too, the only real constituent of any divine person is just the divine essence.[17] Augustine makes this last point (not especially clearly) by insisting that the relations cannot count as **(p.206)** inherent accidents, and thus do not count as real things over and above the divine essence.[18]

I do not want to comment much on the cogency of these Latin proposals, since that is not my real purpose here. On the face of it, the claim about the identity of God and his attributes seems safe enough. But the claim that the persons are distinct merely by relations may turn out to be highly controversial – as would be a claim that any two or more things could be distinct merely by relations. Leftow, in any case, has a rather different way of spelling out just what it is for the divine persons to be distinct from each other, in terms of different but concurrent segments of one and the same life. What I want to show instead is that Gregory of Nyssa agrees entirely with the account just ascribed to Aquinas and Augustine, and thus that we go wrong if we suppose that what Leftow calls Latin Trinitarianism is found only in Latin writers: for I shall locate it too in a mainstream Greek writer – indeed, one who predates all of the Latins cited by Leftow.

## Metaphysics, Semantics, and Divine Simplicity

Suppose, for some substance *x* and some attribute Φ, "*x* is Φ" is true. What makes it true? What entities and relations in the world are required for its truth? On one minimalist view, we do not need to appeal to anything beyond *x* itself. This gives us a one-category analysis of reality, where the only entities are substances. But on another view, we need to appeal both to *x* and to something else as well: a property,Φ-ness – beΦ-ness particular or universal. What makes "*x* is Φ" true in such a case might be (though it need not be) the existence of *x*,Φ-ness, and a relation between them. Or it might be (though it need not be) that *x* exists in a Φ-like mode, or way, or manner. In either case, we would posit a two-category analysis of reality, where the two categories (substances and attributes or properties) are irreducible.

Now, on the one-category analysis of reality proposed above, the doctrine of the absolute simplicity of substances lacking physical or spatial parts follows hard on, since this analysis denies the existence of attributes, and in the absence of spatial parts and attributes, there is nothing else for such a substance to be composed of. One common way of developing a two-category analysis is to divide the world into bare subjects (for properties or attributes) on the one hand, and properties or attributes on the other. This tends to the view that all properties are accidental – and that the (bare) substance *in itself* is simple too. But a two-category analysis of reality does not force this bare particular view: it could be that, for any substance *x* and any *essential* property Φ of *x's*, what makes "*x* is Φ" true is merely *x* itself (and not, e.g., *x* existing in a certain mode or manner, since all there is is *x* itself); whereas for any substance *x* and any *accidental* property ψ of *x's*, what makes "*x* is ψ" true might be (though it need**(p.207)** not be) the existence of *x*, ψ-ness, and a relation between them; or it might be (though it need not be) that *x* exists in a ψ-like mode, or way, or manner. Now it seems to me that something like this modified two-category analysis can be found in Gregory of Nyssa, and I shall briefly defend this reading of Gregory here. Specifically, I think that Gregory holds precisely the view I just outlined for accidental predications, and that he holds that the account of essential predication is true in the case of God (where God is identical with his essence); but that in the case of creatures, he makes a distinction between a substance and its (universal) essence, such that for any substance *x* and any essential property Φ of *x's*, what makes "*x* is Φ" true is *x's* having the *essence* it does. The essence is not somehow composed of distinct entities: it is simple and undifferentiated. It is the only entity required, over and above the substance itself, to make locutions

of the form “*x* is Φ” true in cases where “Φ” expresses an essential property of *x's*. (Barring the claim that essences are universals, this view seems to me to be the one that Aquinas takes too; but space precludes providing the evidence for Aquinas's view here.)

The theological consequence of such a view is that, in the case of a substance that is both identical with its essence and lacks any accidental properties, such as God is held to be by both Gregory and Thomas, what makes any true locution of the form “God is Φ” true is simply God himself. We could say, too, “simply the divine essence itself,” on the understanding that the divine essence is identical (Leibniz-style) with God. And supposing God lacks accidents, he turns out to be wholly simple on this view, lacking any kind of composition. And on the assumption that what distinguishes the divine persons are not accidents, something analogous holds in the case of locutions about the persons too: no entity or mode other than God himself is required for the truth of a claim such as “God is Father,” or “The Father is God,” for example; and likewise for locutions about the Son and the Spirit. This is, of course, just the Latin view as I have been outlining it.

Now for the evidence. Gregory takes it as a general truth that, where “Φ” expresses an essential property, what makes locutions of the form “*x* is Φ” true is just *x's* having the essence it does:

> What he [Basil of Caesarea] said was that corn by itself appears to be essentially a single reality, but it changes its designations according to the various properties envisaged in it: as it becomes seed, fruit, food, and whatever else it becomes, so many are its names…. Corn, though a single thing, enjoys various appellations derived from various ideas about it.[19]

**(p.208)** The claim that corn is one thing is to be contrasted with the claim that it is in any sense*composite*.[20] The idea is that corn is a simple substance that can be described in different ways as it comes to exist in different states: it falls under the extension of different concepts without this implying that it is in any way, at any given time, composite, or that there are any sorts of extramental distinctions between its various properties, corresponding to the linguistic distinction of predicates, or mental distinction of concepts. As the last sentence makes clear, Gregory believes that, corresponding to the nominal distinction between predicates there are relevant conceptual distinctions too. For names signify concepts:

> Every word, or every word properly so called, is a sound which denotes some movement of thought; and every activity and motion of the healthy mind aims, so far as it is able, at the knowledge and consideration of existent things.[21]

Properly functioning cognitive mechanisms give genuine knowledge and information about real things in the world: these things fall under the extensions of the concepts entertained by means of such mechanisms. The important point, however, is that the essential attributes of (e.g.) corn are not entities over and above (the essence of) corn, and what makes the various predications of corn true is simply the corn's having the (non-composite) essence that it does. I return to these points later, because Gregory makes his claim about merely conceptual distinctions between attributes most clearly in the Trinitarian context, which I discuss below.

The case contrasts strikingly with the treatment of accidental predication:

> Most of the things we see in the creation…have no simple nature, such that it might be possible to include the object under one term, as in the case of fire there is by nature one underlying reality, whereas the name which denotes the reality is different: the one is luminous and burning, dry and hot and consuming the material it seizes, the name is a short sound pronounced in a single syllable. For this reason an account which distinguishes the potencies and properties observed in fire names each one separately…; one could not say that a single term has been applied to fire, when one terms it bright or consuming or by some other of its observed features; such words are indicative of the potencies naturally inherent in it.[22]

The idea is that these various qualities of fire are really inherent in it, and fire thus fails to be simple. And Gregory makes it clear that the truths of these various predications requires that there are real properties, over and above the essence of fire, inherent in the fire. So what makes the accidental predications true is a relationship of inherence between fire and the relevant property.

The picture is not entirely consistent, but this is largely because the respective examples – corn and fire – seem ill-chosen: we have to imagine corn as a simple substance, and fire as one with inherent accidents. (I assume that Gregory stuck to the peculiarly inappropriate example of corn because it was used by his beloved and **(p.209)** respected brother, Basil, rather than because of its intrinsic merits.) But the general point is clear enough: in cases where properties are

entities over and above their substances, and inhering in them, what makes predications of the form "*x* is Φ" true is the existence of*x*, Φ-ness, and a relation of inherence between the two. In cases where the properties are simply the essence itself, what makes predications of the form "*x* is Φ" true is simply *x's* having the essence it does; the different predications reflect the fact that the one simple substance falls under the extension of different concepts, without this conceptual differentiation entailing any real distinction of entities.

Gregory's theological opponent, Eunomius, found this claim counterintuitive. If, in the predication "*x*is Φ," we "apply…['Φ' merely] conceptually," then it cannot be the case that the predication is true, "For what is so spoken…is as fleeting as the words themselves."[23] The idea is that, if our terms signify mere conceptions, then they do not signify real properties of things, and if there is no real propertyΦ-ness, over and above the thing, *x*, of which it is a property, that it cannot be true that *x* is Φ. But, as we have seen, Gregory certainly has the tools to respond to this. (When we look at his treatment of divine locutions, we shall see that he certainly has a successful *ad hominem* argument against Eunomius, and in favor of his own view.) Truth requires that thoughts, and the locutions expressing them, accurately correspond to reality.[24] But this correspondence, contrary to Eunomius's metaphysical claims, does not require any elaborate ontological apparatus to secure it, since meanings are not dependent on such metaphysical machinery. The semantics, Gregory claims, is simply independent of the metaphysics, and Eunomius is confusing two distinct questions in attempting to tie the two together. In consequence, Gregory is able to posit a much more metaphysically parsimonious world than Eunomius.

Now, all of this applies straightforwardly in the case of God. Gregory holds God to be simple, and this entails, according to Gregory, that God has no inherent properties – no accidents:

> The Divinity is always the same, and…what he is now he everlastingly is, and…nothing that he has not comes to be his by any sort of growth or addition, but that he exists everlastingly with every good that can be thought of or spoken.[25]
>
> There can be no lack of wisdom or power or any other good thing in one to whom goodness is not something acquired, but who is by nature constituted essentially such; so that whoever claims to apprehend lesser and greater beings in the divine nature has unwittingly argued that the divine is composed of dissimilar elements, so as to consider the subject to be one

> thing, and the attribute quite another, by participation in which what is not goodness comes to possess it.[26]

**(p.210)** – and that, as strongly stated at the end of the passage just quoted, God is really the same as each divine property:

> But if he [Eunomius] truly envisaged the essence as simple and altogether one, being itself what goodness actually is, and not becoming such by acquiring it, he would not think about it in terms of more or less.[27]

> Nothing about him therefore is either previous or recent, otherwise he would have to be older or younger than himself. If God is not everlastingly all things, but in some order and sequence he is one thing and becomes another, and there is no compounding where he is concerned, but whatever he is, he is entirely; and if, as the [Eunomian] heresy teaches he is first Unbegotten and then becomes Father; since the amassing of qualities is not conceivable in his case, he can only become in his entirety both senior and junior to his entire self, as Unbegotten being prior to himself, and in terms of the concept of Father becoming subsequent to himself.[28]

This entails further that each divine property is really the same as each other divine property:

> In a case [such as the Trinity]…it is not possible to conceive any mixture and combination of qualities, but the mind apprehends a power without parts and composition.…One who observes that such comparisons [viz. of greater or lesser] be made must inevitably envisage the incidence of some qualities in the subject.[29]

But Gregory insists nevertheless that the various concepts – the meanings of the various words we use of God – are different from each other. He makes the point by means of his main anti-Eunomian argument that if we believe unbegottenness to be the same concept as other concepts indicating the divine essence, then the only true claim to be made of God is that he is unbegotten. Equivalently, as Gregory puts it, if unbegottenness is something extramental, then so too must other divine attributes be: and this compromises divine simplicity:

> They [i.e. Gregory's Eunomian opponents] insist that, because the Father's essence is simple, it must be reckoned nothing else but unbegottenness, since it is also said to be unbegotten. To them we may also reply that, because the Father is also called Creator and Producer, and the one so called

> is also simple in essence, it is time these clever people announced that the essence of the Father is creation and producing, since no doubt the argument from simplicity attaches to his essence the meaning of every word which applies to him.[30]

So our different words have different meanings – they express different concepts -without this requiring that there are extramental distinctions between divine properties. Since all divine properties are the same as God, what makes predications of the form "God is Φ" true is just God himself.[31] This is sufficient *ad hominem* against **(p.211)** Eunomius, since Eunomius, at least as presented by Gregory, wants to maintain that unbegottenness is what the divine essence is. On the assumption of a strong version of divine simplicity, maintained by both Gregory and Eunomius, this entails that God can have no other properties – something that, Gregory insists, Eunomius cannot have maintained. So, Gregory could argue, whenever Eunomius accepts that claims about God over and above the claim that he is unbegotten are true, he is covertly committed to the view that our utterances about God can, in principle, be both meaningful and true without appeal to real, extramental, properties, over and above the simple and wholly undifferentiated divine essence.

Now, the case of unbegottenness is rather difficult, because according to Gregory, "unbegotten" does*not* in any case signify the divine essence – it cannot, because the Son has the divine essence and yet is begotten. Unbegottenness is a property of the Father's. But like other terms employed to talk about God, it "is applied to God only conceptually."[32] Gregory goes onto explain that unbegottenness is a conception that is *not* included in the conception of the essence.[33] Presumably, then, we can partition conceptions of God into (at least) two groups: those that are somehow included in, or immediately entailed by, the conception of the essence – those under whose extension the essence itself falls – and those that are not so included: under whose extension the essence does not fall. *Unbegottenness* falls into this second group. But the point is that there is no difference in terms of simplicity: in any event, our utterances about God do not require any real distinction between divine properties, be they shared by the persons or proper to just one person. Furthermore, Gregory is explicit that what makes it true that the Father is unbegotten is simply the Father himself: "[The Father's] unbegotten existence does not derive from his being called 'unbegotten,' but because he is such, he has the word attached to him."[34] But the relation is not some real constituent of the Father distinct from the divine essence. So it will turn out that what makes it true that the Father is unbegotten

is simply the divine essence: there is, we might say, no entity other than the divine essence to do the relevant explanatory semantic work.

All of this holds for the Son's property of being the only-begotten: “terms [such as ‘unbegotten,’ ‘only-begotten’]…[are] not derived from the natures, but **(p.212)** applied conceptually to their subjects.”[35] This entails that the Father and the Son are both no more complex than the divine essence. And Gregory insists, unsurprisingly, that the Son is no more complex than the Father:

> What we assert is this: each of the words has its own connotation, and “indivisible” is not implied by “unbegotten,” nor “unbegotten” by “simple.” Rather, by “simple” we understand “uncompounded,” and by “unbegotten” we learn that something has no originating cause. We think that we should believe that the Son, being God from God, is himself also simple, because the divine is free from any composition; and similarly in his case, too, that we neither signify simplicity of essence by the title “Son,” nor conversely do we express the meaning of “Son” by “simplicity”; but that by the one word his existence deriving from the Father is expressed, and by “simplicity” just what that word connotes. Since then the phrase “simplicity of essence” is exactly the same whether it is applied to Father or Son, differing neither by subtraction nor by addition, while “begotten” is very different from “unbegotten,” because in each word there is a meaning which is absent in the other, we therefore claim that there is no necessity, the Father being unbegotten, just because his essence is simple, for his essence to be called unbegottenness.[36]

This, I take it, is clearly consistent with the gist of Leftow's Latin Trinitarianism. In terms of the links with the earlier (patristic and medieval) Latin tradition, it is notable that *unbegottenness* and *being only-begotten* are *relations*. Gregory makes the point explicitly when considering the terms “Father” and (by implication) “Son,” claiming that these terms, which designate the persons not under the description of the divine essence but under the description of their “distinguishing properties,” signify the relations between the persons.[37] Thus, the whole Trinitarian picture, in Gregory's account, looks something like this: there is one wholly non-complex entity, God (= the divine essence); the three persons are distinct from each other by relations, where relations are merely mental items, or mind-imposed (as for Augustine and, more explicitly, Aquinas). Again, the same conceptual problem arises as does in the genuine Latin accounts: namely, whether it is coherent for two items to be distinct from each

other *merely* by relations, especially if relations are construed as merely mental items. But I do not wish here to explore this knotty problem further, since it is not germane to my explicitly exegetical task.

## Concluding Reflections

As I have been presenting the “Latin” view, the salient characteristic is that the only features of the divine persons that distinguish them from each other are their mutual relations. Given that (whatever our general account of divine simplicity and **(p.213)** of distinctions between divine monadic properties) none of the thinkers I consider treats relations as anything other than mental items, this approach to the Trinity is one way of achieving Leftow's *desideratum* that each person just is (the one) God. God is, as it were, the only entity present. This traditional version of the Latin view is not the only way of securing the relevant *desideratum*: I do not think, for example, that Leftow is minded to avail himself of it. On the rejected Social Trinitarian views, we posit either three deities (three tropes), or three persons such that there is a distinction between each person's relation to the deity (e.g. the Father's having deity ≠ the Son's having deity). Both of these Social views allow for (though they do not entail) each person's being a distinct mental subject, and I take it that this psychological result is the fundamental goal of Social views, since they generally emphasize the capacity of the three divine persons for interpersonal relationships, and this seems to require distinct mental subjects. The views of the theologians I have been discussing here – Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Aquinas – to the extent that they entail that the only features that distinguish the persons are relations, are on the face of it incompatible with the claim that there are three mental subjects in God, since distinction of mental subject seems to be more than just a relational matter, and it certainly seems to be more than a question of relations *between* the persons, such as the Trinitarian relations are supposed to be.

The claim that the divine persons are distinct merely by relations is an overwhelming feature of the Christian tradition. If my argument here is correct, Social Trinitarianism is a genuinely modern innovation. That said, it seems to me that there are some indications of an alternative way of thinking, albeit merely inchoately, in the tradition. I have in mind in particular worries about Patripassianism found, for example, in Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean*. As Tertullian puts the rejected position, “The Father himself came down into the Virgin, was himself born of her, himself suffered.”[38] Now, suffering is a psychological property, and seems to require a mental subject. The traditional version of Latin

Trinitarianism that I have just been outlining seems to imply merely one mental subject. And it seems to follow that, if there is only one mental subject in the Trinity, then if the Son suffers, so too does the Father. So for this very simple reason, there may be resources in the tradition that tell against the traditional version of Latin Trinitarianism. Indeed, persons seem to be identical with mental subjects: so if there is only one mental subject, there is only one person.[39] Leftow, of course, probably has resources not shared by earlier theologians to deal with this objection, since on his view the suffering is attributed to just one portion of the divine life, and this does not entail that it is attributed to the whole life – but this, of course, is because his version of Trinitarianism is itself novel.[40] **(p.214)**

Notes:

(1) Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–50; Leftow, "A Latin Trinity," *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 304–34; Leftow, "Modes without Modalism," in Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (eds.), *Persons: Human and Divine*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 357–75.

(2) Leftow, "A Latin Trinity," 304; "Modes without Modalism," 357.

(3) Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM, 1981), 198–99.

(4) See for example the various different approaches to the topic in Rowan Williams, "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on *De Trinitate*," in B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, and J. van Houlin (eds.),*Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. van Bavel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 317–22; Michel René Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51–79; Richard Cross, "Two Models of the Trinity?" *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 275–94; David Bentley Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*," in Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 111–31 (many of the essays in Coakley's valuable collection can be read profitably in this context); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chs. 14 and 15; Richard Cross, "*Quid tres?* On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in *De Trinitate* 5 and 7,"*Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 215–32. The best refutation of the

fundamental historiographical paradigm upon which the older analyses tended to rely is André de Halleux, “Personalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les pères cappadociens,” *Revue théologique de Louvain*17 (1986): 129–55, 265–92.

(5) John Behr has recently argued that attempts to speak of one Trinitarian tradition, common to East and West, tend to read the Eastern theologians through Western eyes, identifying God – the one God – as the Trinity (in line with the practice of the West), and not as the Father (in line with the practice of the East): see “Response to Ayers: The Legacies of Nicaea, East and West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 145–52. Oddly, Behr himself draws attention to the extent to which Gregory of Nazianzus – known in the East as Gregory the Theologian – was uncomfortable with the accepted Eastern liturgical custom, which entailed identifying God as the Father. In any case, whether the standard Eastern practice necessarily indicates a genuine *conceptual* difference from the West, rather than merely one in liturgical custom, I doubt. Differences in the *lex orandi* do not necessitate differences in the *lex credendi*, and my guess is that this difference in practice turns out to conceptually insignificant. After all, the Cappadocians, as we shall see, believe the divine essence and God to be identical, and the divine essence to be coordinately shared by all three persons. It is simply liturgical convention that precludes prayers addressed to the divine essence. I have argued elsewhere that an important conceptual shift occurred between Athanasius and the Cappadocians (see my “On Generic and Derivation Views of God's Trinitarian Substance,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 [2003]: 464–80), and would be inclined to reply to Behr, in the light of the argument I made there, that the Cappadocian theologies of the Trinity simply fit less well than earlier ones do with Eastern liturgical and devotional practice.

(6) Leftow, “Modes without Modalism,” 358.

(7) Ibid., 358–59.

(8) Ibid., 358.

(9) Ibid., 359.

(10) Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae [= ST]* 1.3.3 c.

(11) See my “Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002): 372–410.

(12) Aquinas, *ST* 1.3.3 ad 2; see too ST 1.13.1 ad 2.

(13) On this, see my “Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” 402–5.

(14) Aquinas, *ST* 1.39.1 c.

(15) We might now think of things in this way; historically, there was a strong if ultimately minority medieval tradition that tended to downplay these identity claims. I have in mind especially Duns Scotus, and theologians who followed him, who want to posit more than merely mind-dependent distinctions between God, the divine attributes, and the personal properties. But that is a story for another time.

(16) “God is called simple because he is whatever he has, excepting that each person is said relatively to the others”: Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XI.10 (CCSL, 48:330).

(17) For all these points, see Augustine, *De Trinitate [= De Trin.]* VII.6.11, 28–33 (CCSL, 50:262).

(18) See Augustine, *De Trin.* V.5.6, 1–8 (CCSL, 50:210).

(19) Gregory, *Contra Eunomium [= C. Eun.]* 2.353 (Gregorii Nysseni opera [= GNO], ed. W. Jaeger and others [Leiden: Brill, 1960– ], 329, ll. 3–7, 16–17; English translation by Stuart George Hall, in Lenka Karfiková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II. An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 10th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Olomouc, September 15–18, 2004)*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 82 [Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2007] [= Hall II], 138). Gregory refers to Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium*1.6 (PG 29:524BC).

(20) For the contrariety between one (*mia*) and composite (*sunthetos*), see Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun*. 2.501 (GNO, 1:372, ll. 25–26; Hall II, 172).

(21) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun*. 2.572 (GNO, 1:393, ll. 14–17; Hall II, 188).

(22) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun*. 2.271 (GNO, 1: 305, l. 26–p. 306, l. 12; Hall II, 119–20).

(23) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.44 (GNO, 1:238,ll.26–27; Hall II, 69), summarizing Eunomius's views.

(24) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.576 (GNO, 1:394,ll. 12–17; Hall II, 189).

(25) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.449 (GNO, 1:357,ll. 24–27; Hall II, 161).

(26) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 1.234 (GNO, 1:95,ll. 12–20; English translation by Stuart George Hall, in Lucas F. Mateo-Seco and Juan L. Bastero (eds.), *El Contra Eunomium I en la Produccion Literaria de Gregorio de Nisa: VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa* [Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1988] [= Hall I], 69).

(27) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 1.235 (GNO, 1:95,ll. 20–23; Hall I, 69, slightly adapted).

(28) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 1.597 (GNO, 1:198,ll. 7–14, Hall I, 121, punctuation altered).

(29) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 1.232–233 (GNO, 1:95, ll. 1–3, 5–6; Hall I, 69, slightly adapted).

(30) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.31 (GNO, 1:235, 18–26; Hall II, *66*, adapted).

(31) Strictly, Gregory is hesitant to claim that our utterances about God really express anything at all about the divine nature: they either express something about divine activity (Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.*2.149 [GNO, 1:268, ll. 28–29; Hall II, 91]; *C. Eun.* 2:583–86 [GNO, 1:396,l. 16 – p. 397,l. 23; Hall II, 191–92]), or they do no more than tell us what God is not (Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.579–80 [GNO, 1:395, ll. 14–29; Hall II, 190] – though see *C. Eun.* 2.130–41 [GNO, 1:263, l. 21 – p. 266, l. 26; Hall II, 87–89] for a different, and rather less apophatic, view; and see *C. Eun.* 2.114–16 [GNO, 1:259, l. 27 – p. 260, l. 6; Hall II, 84–85] for apophaticism extended to the essences of created substances too: Gregory's claim here is that only the accidents of things can be known, and not their simple essences). Divine activity is contingent (and thus claims about divine activity are made true by the divine will: Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.150 [GNO, 1:269, ll. 9–10; Hall II, 91]); but many claims about what God is*not* are necessary, and what makes these true is indeed the divine essence, even though the predicates do not tell us anything about what God or the divine essence actually is. The crucial claim is that Gregory is strongly committed to denying any sort of distinction in God, and this, I take it, is the assumption in his refutation of Eunomius.

(32) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.11 (GNO, 1:229, l. 30 – p. 230, l. 2; Hall II, 61–62).

(33) This is, I take it, the burden of the whole discussion in Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.31–43 (GNO, 1:235, l. 18 – p. 238, l. 26; Hall II, 66–69).

(34) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.162 (GNO, 1:272, ll. 8–10; Hall II, 94).

(35) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.125 (GNO, 1:262, ll. 23–24; Hall II, 87).

(36) Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 2.29 (GNO, 1:234, l. 23 – p. 235, l. 8; Hall II, 65–66).

(37) Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* [= Ref.] 6 (GNO, 2:314, l. 28 – p. 315, l. 6; English trans. in Gregory of Nyssa, *Select Writings and Letters*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994] [= NPNF], 102a); also *Ref.* 16 (GNO, 2:319, ll. 1–3; NPNF, 103b).

(38) Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 1 (Opera III, ed. E. Kroymann, CSEL, 47 [Vienna: Tempsky; Leipzig: Freytag, 1906]: 227, ll. 6–7).

(39) Perhaps we could think of two minds in one mental subject, with distinct first-person perspectives, sharing one trope (e.g. a humanity trope). But mental properties are themselves tropes, so the two minds do not share all the same tropes, as is required by Leftow's Latin Trinitarianism.

(40) Thanks to Brian Leftow for comments on a slightly earlier draft of this paper.

# Part III

# Relative Trinitarianism: Prospects and Problems

# And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God

**Peter van Inwagen**

## 1

Christians believe that the love of one person for another is an essential part of the internal life of God. This is consonant with the Christian belief that all good things in creation are, in some way or other, copies or images of the uncreated. God himself, Christian theology teaches, could not invent the idea of a good that was not prefigured in his own nature, for in the radiant plenitude of that nature, all possible goods are comprehended. And this holds for the supreme good, love. All forms of human love are (we believe) copies of the love that is internal to God. The natural affections of the family, friendship, sexual love (insofar as it is uncorrupted), the charity that will endure when faith has been swallowed up in sight and hope in fulfillment – all of these are creaturely images of the love that already existed, full and perfect and complete, when Adam still slept in his causes.

Like Christians, Jews and Muslims believe that power and goodness and wisdom and glory are from everlasting to everlasting. But only Christians believe this of love, for the eternality of love is a fruit of the uniquely Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is no arid theological speculation. It is not a thing that Christians can ignore when they are not thinking about philosophy or systematic theology. The doctrine of the Trinity ought to have as central a place in Christian worship and religious feeling as the doctrines of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Let me give one example of how the doctrine of the Trinity touches the deepest concerns of Christians. When we think of our hope of salvation, we tend to think of something individual. If you had asked me a year ago what I thought salvation consisted in, I think I should have said something like this: Each of us bears within him an image of God that has been distorted by sin, and his salvation will be accomplished when – if – that image has been restored in Christ. I do not mean to imply that I now think that this answer is wrong; but I do now think that it is incomplete. The Christian hope is not merely a hope about what will happen to us as individuals. The Beatific Vision is not something that each of the saints will enjoy separately and individually, alone with God. *Vita venturi saeculi* is a **(p.218)** corporate life, the life of the Church Triumphant. And the establishment of this corporate life will consist in the whole Body of Christ coming to be an

undistorted image of God. If you and I are one day members of the Risen Church, then you will indeed be a restored image of God and I shall indeed be a restored image of God. But there is more: The love we have for each other will be a restored image of the love that the Persons of the Trinity have for one another.

But can this really be? If the "eternal life we are by grace called to share, here below in the obscurity of faith and after death in eternal light"[1] is the life of the Trinity, had we not better worry about the very logical possibility of the Christian hope? For how can the love of one person for another be internal to the life of God, who is, after all, one being? ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.") Must not Jew and Muslim and unbeliever join in demanding of us that we disclose the ill-concealed secret of all the Christian ages: that we are mere polytheists? Or if we are not mere polytheists, then are we not something worse: polytheists who are also monotheists, polytheists engaged in a pathetic attempt to remain loyal to the God of Israel through sheer force of reiterated logical contradiction? For do we not say all of the following things? There is one divine Being, but there are three distinct Persons, each of whom is a divine Being; and the one divine Being is a Person, though not a fourth Person in addition to those three; nor is he any one of the three.[2]

My primary purpose in this paper is to explore one way of replying to the charge that Christians are either simple polytheists or else polytheists and monotheists at the same time. I shall not be terribly unhappy if the reply I propose to explore turns out to be unsatisfactory. The Trinity has always been described as a mystery, as something that surpasses human understanding. If one is unable to answer satisfactorily questions posed by a mystery – well, what should one expect?

Now if the Christian faith were a human invention, a theory devised by human beings to explain certain features of the world, then we should be wrong to be **(p.219)** complacent about our inability to answer pointed questions about it. In such a case, if, after lengthy, determined, and serious effort to answer these questions, we should find ourselves still unable to answer them, then we ought to consider replacing our theory with one that does not pose these apparently unanswerable questions. But, as the pope recently had occasion to remind the Roman Church in Holland, the faith is no human invention. It is, quite simply, news.

Have we ever been promised by God that we shall understand everything he tells

us well enough to resolve all the intellectual difficulties it raises? God's concern with us – just at present, at any rate – is not the concern of a tutor who fears that we shall fail to grasp some nice point: God fears that we shall lose the end for which we were made. His concern with us is entirely practical. It may well be that if I had the opportunity to ask God to explain his triune nature to me, he would say, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me." It is, as Thomas a` Kempis observed, better to be pleasing to the Holy Trinity than to be able to reason about the mysteries of the Holy Trinity.[3] It may be that it is important for us to know that God is (somehow) three Persons in one Being and not at all important for us to have any inkling of how this could be – or even to be able to answer alleged demonstrations that it is self-contradictory. It may be that we *cannot* understand how God can be three Persons in one Being. It may be that an intellectual grasp of the Trinity is forever beyond us. And why not, really? It is not terribly daring to suppose that reality may contain things whose natures we cannot understand. And if there were such natures, it would not be so very surprising if the highest nature of all were among them. As to alleged demonstrations of contradiction – well, our faith is: There is some way to answer these demonstrations, whether or not *we* can understand it.

The world, of course, has a handy word for this sort of thing: "obscurantism." I would remind the world of certain cases that have arisen in twentieth-century physics. An electron, we are told, is both a wave and a particle. One can ask pointed questions about *this* thesis. A wave is a spreading, periodic disturbance; a particle is a lump of stuff; How can something be both? I think that there are two equally respectable answers to this question: (1) No one knows; (2) Quantum field theory explains how something can be both a wave and a particle.[4] Let us **(p.220)** suppose that the second of these answers is correct, and that some people, those who are at home in quantum field theory, know how something can be both a wave and a particle. Still, there was an interval during which physicists went about saying that electrons were both waves and particles, and had no satisfactory reply to the childishly simple question, "How can something be both a disturbance and a lump of stuff?" (I do not think anyone would say that there was a good answer to this question before Dirac formulated quantum field theory. I am willing to be corrected on this point, however.) And I do not think that anyone should blame the physicists for this. I do not think that anyone should have blamed them even if quantum field theory had somehow never been discovered. There were certain undeniable but absolutely astounding experimental data (a "revelation" from nature, as it were); there was a theory that explained those data (a human invention, to be sure, and an extraordinarily

brilliant one at that, but not a human invention in the way a motet or an abstract painting is – the theory purported to represent physical reality); and that theory implied that an electron had both a mass and a wavelength.

Might it not be that the Christian who accepts the doctrine of the Trinity, even though he is unable to answer certain pointed questions about it, is in a position analogous to that of quantum physicists before the advent of quantum field theory? The world, of course, will reply that the Christian "revelation" is a fantasy, while the revelation disclosed by nature in the double-slit experiment or in the phenomenon of electron diffraction comprises hard facts of observation. But may we not ask the world to consider the question hypothetically? Suppose the Christian revelation were *not* a fantasy. If the Holy Spirit really existed and had led the mind of the Church to the doctrine of the Trinity,[5] *then*might not the Trinitarian be in a position analogous to that of the physicist to whom nature had revealed the doctrine of the Duality? The world may abuse us for believing in God and revelation if it will, but I think the world should admit that once we have accepted something as a revelation, it is reasonable for us to retain it even if we cannot answer all the intellectual difficulties it raises; or at least the world should admit this if the subject matter of the putative revelation is one that it is plausible *a priori* to suppose we should find it very difficult to understand.

While I accept all this as a Christian, I could not help being disappointed as a philosopher if there were no good, humanly accessible replies to the pointed questions raised by the doctrine of the Trinity. These questions are, after all, questions about number, identity, discernibility, personhood, and being. That is to say, they are logical and metaphysical questions, and therefore questions that I am professionally interested in. In this paper, my main purpose is to explore one way of responding to these questions. I should say, first, that I do not endorse the way of looking at the Trinity I shall ask you to consider, but I do think it is worth considering. It is worth asking whether the theses I shall put forward for your **(p.221)** consideration are coherent and whether such light as they cast on the doctrine of the Trinity is orthodox and catholic (in the non-denominational senses of those words). I should say, secondly, that I do not propose to *penetrate* the mystery of the Trinity. I propose to state the doctrine of the Trinity (or part of it: the part that raises all those pointed logical and metaphysical questions) in such a way that it is demonstrable that no formal contradiction can be derived from the thesis that God is three persons and, at the same time, one being.

I do not propose to *explain* how God can be three persons and one being. Here is an analogy. I believe (and I hope that you do, too) that God exists necessarily –

that, like a number or a proposition, he exists in all possible worlds; and I also believe (as I am sure you do, too) that, unlike numbers or propositions, he is a concrete being possessing causal powers. I have no idea how something could both exist necessarily and possess causal powers. And I think that no other human being does. How there could be something with both these features is a mystery. But I do not see any reason to suppose that a contradiction might be derivable from the thesis that God is both necessary and concrete, or from this thesis taken together with any plausible logical or metaphysical assumptions. It is in more or less this condition that I should like to leave the doctrine of the Trinity. But, as I have said, I shall not achieve even this modest goal in the present paper. I wish only to propose a way of stating that doctrine that can be shown to be free from formal inconsistency. Whether the doctrine, so stated, actually is the catholic faith (which I mean to keep whole and undefiled) will be a matter for further discussion.

The device I shall exploit for this purpose is the notion of relative identity, familiar to us from the work of Professor Geach. Professor Geach has discussed the abstract notion of relative identity in some detail, and has made some helpful and suggestive remarks about relative identity and the Trinity.[6]What I shall try to do is to expand these suggestive remarks in such a way as to enable us to see what a systematic and thoroughgoing attempt to express the propositions of Trinitarian theology in terms of relative identity would look like.[7] **(p.222)** While the entire impetus of the thoughts of this paper is thus due to Professor Geach, we should not suppose that the idea of applying the notion of relative identity to the problems about identity and counting posed by the doctrine of the Trinity is an idiosyncratic whim of one twentieth-century Roman Catholic logician. Professor Geach, when alluding to the historical antecedents of his views – and rarely if ever does he do more than allude – usually manages to mention Thomas Aquinas. But the following (rather scattered) quotation from the*Quicunque Vult* – a document that was certainly in more or less its present form by about 500 a.d. – speaks for itself:

> The Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.
>
> For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost…
>
> The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

> And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal…
>
> So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty.
>
> And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.
>
> So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.
>
> And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
>
> So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord.
>
> And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.
>
> For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord,
>
> So we are forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.[8]

**(p.223)** Before turning to a detailed treatment of relative identity and the Trinity, I shall make some remarks on the meaning of the word person in Trinitarian theology.

## 2

Anyone who undertakes to give an account of the Trinity will find it hard to avoid falling into some heresy that is summarized in a helpful little article in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Roughly speaking, these heresies are bounded on the one side by Modalism and on the other by Tritheism. Modalism, in its crudest form, holds that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the same person and the same being, this one being or person being conceived, on various occasions, under each of these names in relation to an office, function, or "mode" appropriate to that name. (I say "in its crudest form" because Modalism may be variously disguised.) Thus, "the Father" is simply a name of God, one we use when we are thinking of him as our creator and judge, rather than as (say) our redeemer or our comforter. Modalism is associated historically with Sabellius (it is sometimes called Sabellianism), and with Peter Damien. Tritheism is, of course, the thesis that there are three Gods. Of these two heresies, Tritheism would seem to be the more serious. If Modalism subverts the doctrine of the Incarnation of the World by flatly contradicting either our lord's

divinity or else his consistent representation of himself and his Father as distinct persons, Tritheism strikes, by definition, at the very root of monotheism.

Nevertheless, it is Tritheism that I shall risk. I have two reasons. First, the language of the Creeds is as safe from a modalistic interpretation as any language could be. If a philosopher or theologian is guided by the Creeds, he will be directed resolutely away from Modalism, and I propose to be guided by the Creeds. Secondly, I think that Modalism is a far easier heresy than Tritheism to fall into in our time, and is, therefore, a doctrine that a Christian thinker ought to stay as far away from as possible. I have recently heard a priest of my own communion, guided, I suppose, by a desire to avoid saying anything that implied that God had a sex, bless the people at the end of Mass not with the prescribed words, "…the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost…" but rather with the words "…God our Creator, God our Redeemer, and God our Sanctifier." Note that what are enumerated in this formula are not persons but functions, offices, or modes, and that this formula has been used in place of a customary and familiar formula in which the divine Persons are enumerated. The "new" formula is no more a Trinitarian formula than is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". You may tell me that the three offices enumerated have been, in liturgy and tradition, associated respectively with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I will reply that that is true, but does not affect my point. (Moreover the nature of that **(p.224)** "association" or "appropriation" is a nice theological problem. Whatever it means, it does not mean that, e.g., only the Father was involved in the creation. The Nicene Creed says of the Son: "by whom (*per quem*) all things were made", and in this it echoes Colossians 1:15–17 and the opening words of John's gospel.) My priest, of course, was not a Modalist and did not intend to preach Modalism. But note how easy it is for one whose purposes are remote from questions of Trinitarian theology inadvertently to use words that are, in context, Modalistic in tendency.

It is my intention in this paper to avoid Modalism by adhering rigorously to the doctrine that there are three distinct divine Persons. Two comments are in order.

(1) I shall ignore all problems related to the predication of wisdom, goodness, knowledge – and personality itself – and other attributes predictable of created persons to the divine Persons. Such predication is, I think, as much a difficulty for the Unitarian (i.e., the Jew or Muslim) as for the Trinitarian, and I think it is the *same* difficulty for the Unitarian and the Trinitarian. In any case, I cannot attend to all the problems of

philosophical theology at once.

(2) It is sometimes contended that "person" in Trinitarian theology does not mean what it means in everyday life or in the philosophy of mind or even in non-Trinitarian applications of this word to God. Professor Geach has answered this contention with his usual vigor, and I am of his party:

> [S]ome will protest that I am equivocating between the normal use of the term "person" and its technical theological use. I reject the protest. The concept of a person, which we find so familiar in its application to human beings, cannot be clearly and sharply expressed by any word in the vocabulary of Plato and Aristotle; it was wrought with the hammer and anvil of theological disputes about the Trinity and the Person of Christ.[9]

He goes on to say, "The familiar concept of a person finds linguistic expression not only in the use of a noun for 'person' but also in the use of the personal pronouns…" In addition to the uses of personal pronouns in connection with the divine Persons that Geach proceeds to cite, we may call attention to the English translation of the *Quicunque Vult* quoted above ("…to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord"), and the closing words of Proper 27 of the Episcopal Church: "…where with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end."[10]

## (p.225) 3

In this section, I shall outline a system of formal logic I shall call Relative-Identity Logic, or RI-logic for short.[11] I shall also attempt to answer the question: On what assumptions is a logic of relative identity of philosophical interest?

A formal logic comprises a vocabulary and a set of formation rules, a set of rules of inference, and, sometimes, a set of axioms. We shall require no axioms.

The vocabulary of RI-logic will consist of certain predicates of English (including 0-place predicates: closed sentences), the usual sentential connectives, variables, the universal and existential quantifiers, and suitable punctuation marks.[12] It will *not* include the identity sign, the description operator, or any terms other than variables.

We shall assume that our vocabulary contains all English predicates that conform to the following three constraints.

**(p.226)** (1) Our stock of English predicates will not include any that contain the informal analogues of the things we have pointedly excluded from our formal apparatus: identity, descriptions, demonstratives, and names. Thus we exclude "α is identical with some Albanian", "The tallest man is rich", "That is a dog", and "α is Jack's father". It would cause no *formal*difficulties to include such predicates in the language of RI-logic, since a formal logic does not "interact" with the semantic content (if there is any) of the items it manipulates formally, but to do so would be confusing and contrary to the motivating spirit of RI-logic.
(2) With the exception of a special class of predicates noted in (3) below, our stock of English predicates will include no predicates containing count-nouns. (A count-noun is a noun that has a plural form and which can be modified by the indefinite article.) Thus we exclude: "α is an apple", "α owns three horses", and "α has more children than β". Some acceptable predicates are: "α is heavy", "α is made of gold", "α is spherical" and "α is taller than β". We shall not, however, be really fanatical about excluding count-nouns. We shall be liberal enough to admit count-nouns that are mere grammatical conveniences. For example, we shall admit "α has six sides" because one might just as well express what is expressed by this predicate by writing "α is six-sided". The rough rule is: A count-noun is "all right" if its use does not commit its user to there being things it counts. If one says, "The box weighs four pounds," one does not lay oneself open to the following sort of ontological interrogation: "Just what is a 'pound'? What properties do these 'pounds' have? You say the box weighs four of them; but how many of them are there (in all, I mean)?"
(3) Consider phrases of the form "α is the same N as β", where "N" represents the place of a count-noun. Sometimes predicates of this form are used in such a way as to imply that α and β are *N*s and sometimes they are not. If I say, "Tully is the same man as Cicero," I imply that Tully and Cicero are men. If I say, "The Taj Mahal is the same color as the Washington Monument," I do not imply that these two edifices are colors. Let us call a predicate of the form "is the same *N* as" a *relative-identity predicate* (or "RI-predicate") if it is satisfied only by Ns. A predicate that is not an RI-predicate we call an *ordinary* predicate. Thus, "is the same man as" is an RI-predicate, and "is the same color as" is an ordinary predicate – as are "is green", "is round", and "is taller than". (Actually, we should not say that predicates of the form "is the same *N* as" are or are not RI-predicates *in themselves*, for a predicate of this form may be used sometimes as an RI-predicate and sometimes as an ordinary predicate.

> Consider, for example, “Magenta is the same color as bluishred”. In this sentence, “is the same color as” functions as an RI-predicate. In the sequel, I shall ignore this complication.) Count-nouns – seriously meant count-nouns like “apple”, “horse”, and “child” – may turn up in our stock of English predicates in just one way: as components of RI-predicates. Thus we admit “α is the same apple as β”, “α is the same horse as β”, and so on.

Having introduced RI-predicates, we may introduce ordinary predicates of the form “a is a(n) N” (e.g. “α is an apple”; “α is a child”) by abbreviation: “a is an apple” abbreviates “∃β α is the same apple as β”, and so on. To be an apple, in other words, is to be the same apple as something.

**(p.227)** The formation rules of RI-logic are the obvious ones.

The rules of inference of RI-logic are simply the rules of ordinary quantifier logic – developed as a system of natural deduction – supplemented by two rules for manipulating RI-predicates. Since RI-predicates are closely connected with the idea of identity, we should expect these rules to be in at least some ways analogous to the inference-rules governing classical identity. This is indeed the case. The two rules are:

*Symmetry* From Iαβ, infer Iβα

*Transitivity* From Iαβ and Iβγ, infer *Iαγ*.

Here, of course, “I” represents any RI-predicate and the Greek letters represent any variables. Using these two rules, we may prove something that will be a minor convenience to us, the general fact of which the following statement is an instance: “*∃y x* is the same apple as *y*” is equivalent to “*x* is the same apple as *x*”.[13] “Right-to-left” is simply an instance of Existential Generalization. We proceed from left to right as follows: We have “*x* is the same apple as z” by Existential Instantiation; from this we infer “*z* is the same apple as *x*” by Symmetry; from these two sentences, “*x* is the same apple as *x*” follows by Transitivity.

This result is a convenience because it allows us to regard, e.g., “*x* is an apple” as an abbreviation for “*x*is the same apple as *x*” instead of for “*∃y x* is the same apple as *y*”, which will simplify the typography of the sequel. This result also makes it clear why we have no rule corresponding to the reflexivity rule of classical identity logic. A reflexivity rule for RI-predicates would look like this:

From any premises, infer *Iαα*. But if we had this rule, we could prove, e.g. that everything is the same apple as itself – that is to say, we could prove that everything is an apple.

Do we need further rules for manipulating RI-predicates? It might be argued that we must have such rules if RI-logic is to be at all interesting. Developments of the classical logic of identity always include some rule or axiom motivated by the intuitive idea that if *x* is identical with *y*, then *x* and *y* satisfy all the same predicates. In fact, all the classical principles of identity can be derived from a reflexivity rule ("From any premises, infer α = α") and an "indiscernibility" rule: From any premises, infer

$$\alpha = \beta \rightarrow (\mathrm{F}\ldots\alpha\ldots \leftrightarrow \mathrm{F}\ldots\beta\ldots)."$$

Here *F*…α…represents a sentence in which β does not occur, and *F*…β… represents the result of replacing any (or all) free occurrences of α in *F*…α… with β. For example:

$$x = y \rightarrow (\exists w\ z \text{ is between } x \text{ and } w. \leftrightarrow \exists w\ z \text{ is between } y \text{ and } w).$$

If RI-logic is to be interesting (it might be argued), it must be supplied with some analogue of this rule. What could this analogue be? It will certainly *not* do to have **(p.228)** the following rule (call it "The Proposed Rule"): Where I is any RI-predicate, from any premises infer

$$I\alpha\beta \rightarrow (F\ldots\alpha\ldots \leftrightarrow F\ldots\beta\ldots)."$$

For example:

$$x \text{ is the same man as } y \rightarrow (z \text{ is west of } x \leftrightarrow z \text{ is west of } y).$$

If we added the Proposed Rule to RI-logic, we should get a logic that treated RI-predicates as if they were all of the form "*x* is an N & *x* = *y*", where *N* is a countnoun and "= " represents classical, absolute identity.[14] For example, the resulting logic would treat "*x* is the same apple as *y*" as if it had the logical properties ascribed to "*x* is an apple & *x* = *y*" by the classical logic of identity.

We may put this point more precisely as follows. Call a sentence like "*x* is the same apple as *y*" that is formed from an RI-predicate and two occurrences of variable, an *RI-expression*. Call the sentence "*x* is an apple & *x* = *y*" the *classical image* of the RI-expression "*x* is the same apple as *y*". Similarly "z is a horse & *z*

= w" is the classical image of "z is the same horse as w"; the definition is obvious. More generally, the classical image of a *sentence* of the language of RI-logic is got by replacing each occurrence of an RI-expression in that sentence with its classical image.

Adding the Proposed Rule to RI-logic has this consequence:

> A sentence is a theorem of RI-logic if and only if its classical image is an instance of a theorem of the classical logic of identity.

By an instance of a theorem of the classical logic of identity, I mean a sentence that results from such a theorem by substituting English predicates (consistently) for all of its predicate-letters. (Of course most instances of theorems of the classical logic of identity are not classical images of any sentence of RI-logic; "*x* = *y* & *x* is green. → *y* is green", for example, is not.) The following three sentences are instances of theorems of the classical logic of identity:

$$x \text{ is an apple } \& \ x = y. \rightarrow .y \text{ is an apple } \& \ y = x$$
$$x \text{ is an apple } \& \ x = y \ \& \ y \text{ is an apple } \& \ y = z. \rightarrow .x \text{ is an apple } \& \ x = z$$
$$w \text{ is an apple } \& \ w = y. \rightarrow (w \text{ is green} \leftrightarrow y \text{ is green}).$$

Therefore (if the above thesis about adding the Proposed Rule to RI-logic is correct), the sentences of which these are the classical images are theorems of RI-logic supplemented by the Proposed Rule. (Hereinafter, "RI-logic+".) For example, the sentence

$$w \text{ is the same apple as } y \rightarrow (w \text{ is green} \leftrightarrow y \text{ is green}).$$

**(p.229)** is a theorem of RI-logic+. And it is, I think, intuitively obvious that a sentence is a theorem of RI-logic+ if and only if its classical image is an instance of a theorem of the classical logic of identity. It does not seem to be overstating the case to say that RI-logic+treats "α is the same *N* as β" as a stylistic variant on "α is an *N* & α = β". If RI-logic+is the correct logic for reasoning about relative identities, then there is no point in having a special logic for reasoning about relative identities. The correct principles for reasoning about relative identities follow from the correct principles for reasoning about absolute identities. One need do no more than put a check mark beside each instance of a theorem of the logic of classical identity that is a classical image of some sentence in the language of RI-logic and say "These are the formal truths about so-called relative identities. You may pronounce, e.g., 'zis an apple & *z* = *y*' as '*z* is the

same apple as *y*' if you care to."

A logic of relative identity will be interesting only if there are instances of theorems of the classical logic of identity that are the classical images of *non-theorems* of that logic of relative identity. A philosophically interesting logic of relative identity must be (in that sense) "weaker" than the classical logic of identity. (As with para-consistent logic, "intuitionist" logic, quantum logic, and David Lewis's counterfactual logic, a good deal of the philosophical interest of the topic arises from the fact that certain sentences that one might expect to be theorems are not theorems.) I propose to achieve this end as follows: to resist the temptation to supply RI-logic with any special rules of inference beyond Symmetry and Transitivity. This, of course, will not insure that RI-logic is of any philosophical interest. It is certainly of no formal interest. Considered formally, it is simply the quantifier calculus with its two-place predicates partitioned into two classes, within one of which Symmetry and Transitivity apply. What interest it has must come from two sources: first, from the thesis that this rather weak logic does indeed embody all the formal principles of inference that one should have when one reasons about relative identities, and, secondly, from such applications as it may have. The main philosophical interest of "intuitionist" logic lies in the claim that it embodies all the principles of formal reasoning the mathematician can legitimately employ. Quantum logic has no philosophical interest apart from its intended application.

The effect of having no special rules of RI-logic beyond Symmetry and Transitivity (and that comes down to having neither the Proposed Rule nor any restricted version of it) is exemplified by the following case:

$$x \text{ is the same apple as } y \rightarrow (x \text{ is green} \leftrightarrow y \text{ is green})$$

will not be a theorem of RI-logic, despite the fact that its classical image

$$x \text{ is an apple } \& \; x = y. \rightarrow (x \text{ is green} \leftrightarrow y \text{ is green})$$

is an instance of a theorem of the classical logic of identity. More generally, RI-logic differs from RI-logic+in the following way. Call sentences of the following form *dominance sentences*

$$\mathrm{I}\alpha\beta \rightarrow (\mathrm{F}\ldots\alpha\ldots \leftrightarrow \mathrm{F}\ldots\beta\ldots),$$

**(p.230)** where *F*…*α*…is a sentence in which β does not occur, and *F*…*β*…is like *F*…*α*…except for having free occurrences of β at some or all places at which *F*…*α*…has free occurrences of a. All dominance sentences are theorems of RI-logic+. In general, dominance sentences are not theorems of RI-logic -

unless they are instances of theorems of the sentential calculus, or are of the type "*x* is the same apple as *y* → (*x* is the same apple as *z* ↔ *y* is the same apple as *z*)".

In refusing to add the Proposed Rule (or any restricted version of it) to RI-logic, we are in effect saying that each dominance sentence embodies a substantive metaphysical thesis – or perhaps in some cases a trivial metaphysical thesis, but at any rate a *metaphysical* thesis, one that ought not to be underwritten by the formal logic of relative identity. If there were a formal criterion by which we could separate the trivial metaphysical theses from the substantive ones, then we might consider adopting a restricted version of the Proposed Rule, one that yielded only the trivial theses. But there could not be such a formal criterion: If some dominance sentences are substantive and some trivial, the distinction lies in the English meanings of the predicates they contain.

In refusing to adopt the Proposed Rule we are (in effect) saying to whoever proposes to construct a derivation containing RI-predicates: "If you think that a dominance sentence like '*x* is the same apple as *y* → (*x* is green ↔ *y* is green)' is *true*, you are perfectly free to introduce it into your derivation *as a premise*. But then defending it is your responsibility. Formal logic alone does not endorse it." If someone does regard the dominance sentence "*x* is the same apple as *y* → (*x* is green ↔ *y* is green)" as true, let us say that he regards the RI-predicate "is the same apple as" as *dominating* the predicate "is green". (If he believed that *x* and *y* might be the same apple and nevertheless be of different colors, then he would deny that sameness among apples "dominated" color.) Informally, for *I* to dominate *F* is for *I* to "force indiscernibility" in respect of *F*. Formally, an RI-predicate *I* dominates a predicate *F* (*F*may be of any polyadicity and be either ordinary or RI) if all sentences of the form "Iαβ → (F…a… ↔ F…β…)" are true. We say that an RI-predicate that dominates every predicate is *dominant*. It seems a reasonable conjecture that most of us would regard, e.g., "is the same apple as" and "is the same horse as" as dominant.

The question now arises, *are* there any RI-predicates that are not dominant? Are there any false dominance sentences? If all dominance sentences are true (if all RI-predicates are dominant), then the Proposed Rule can never lead from truth to falsity. And if the Proposed Rule can never lead from truth to falsity, then the project of constructing a logic of relative identity is of no interest. It can be accomplished by stipulating that a sentence is a "theorem of the logic of relative identity" if and only if its classical image is an instance of a theorem of the classical logic of identity. There is, after all, no point in refusing to include the

Proposed Rule among the rules of inference of a logic of relative identity if that rule can never lead from truth to falsity. And the Proposed Rule can lead from truth to falsity only if some RI-predicates are not dominant.

**(p.231)** A trick of Professor Geach's shows that some RI-predicates are not dominant.[15] Let us introduce an RI-predicate "is the same surman as" by the following definition:

> α is the same surman as $\beta = df$ α is a man and β is a man and α and β have the same surname.

Thus, John Locke is the same surman as Don Locke. It is evident that "same surman" fails to dominate a great variety of predicates: "is alive in the twentieth century", "has never heard of Kant", "is the same man as", and so on. Or, at least, "same surman" fails to dominate these predicates if it really is an RI-predicate. But it would seem to be: "surman" is a count-noun ("John Locke is a surman"; "Geach and Locke are two surmen") and if *x* is the same surman as *y*, then *x* and *y* are both surmen (i.e., each is the same surman as himself).

But this trick, it seems to me, does not show that the project of constructing a logic of relative identity is of interest. It is true that "is the same surman as" is non-dominant. But it is also easily eliminable from our discourse. Anything we can say using "is the same surman as" we can say without it; we need only use the (presumably dominant) RI-predicate "is the same man as" and the ordinary predicate "has the same surname as". Let us say that if a non-dominant RI-predicate has these features, it is*redundant*. More explicitly: a non-dominant RI-predicate is redundant if everything we can say by making use of it we can say using only dominant RI-predicates and ordinary predicates. If the *only*non-dominant RI-predicates are in this sense redundant, then there is no real point in having a special logic of relative identity. If the only non-dominant RI-predicates are redundant, then – at least when we are engaged in constructing formal derivations – why not just translate all of our premises into sentences containing only dominant RI-predicates and ordinary predicates? Having done that, we may replace each premise that contains RI-predicates with its classical image and employ the classical logic of identity. If it pleases us, we may replace all occurrences in our conclusion of, e.g., "*x* is a man & *y* is a man & *x* and *y* have the same surname" with "*x* is the same surman as *y*". In short, the "surman" trick provides us with no motivation for constructing a logic of relative identity. A logic of relative identity will be of interest only if there are *non-redundant* RI-predicates that are not dominant.

Are there non-redundant RI-predicates that are not dominant? Is there a non-redundant RI-predicate that fails to dominate some predicate? It is tempting to think that if there is such a relation as classical, absolute identity, the answer must be No. (If that is right, the project of constructing a logic of relative identity is interesting only on the assumption that classical, absolute identity does not exist.) Consider, say, "is the same apple as" – which we shall suppose for the sake of the example not to be redundant – and "is green". Suppose that there is such a relation as classical identity. Obviously (one is tempted to say), if *x* is the same **(p.232)** apple as *y*, then $x = y$. We have as an instance of a theorem of the logic of classical identity: $x = y \rightarrow (x \text{ is green} \leftrightarrow y \text{ is green})$. Hence, if *x* is the same apple as *y*, then *x* is green if and only if *y* is green. That is, "is the same apple as" dominates "is green". Essentially the same argument could be constructed for the general case: to show that for any non-redundant RI-predicate I and any predicate F, I dominates F.

The tricky step in the argument for the general case will be the premise that, for just any non-redundant RI-predicate *I*, if *Ixy* then $x = y$. (A redundant RI-predicate *R* may, of course, be such that $Rxy \ \& \sim x = y$. The two Lockes are the same surman but not absolutely identical.) Is this true? Does every non-redundant RI-predicate dominate classical identity, assuming there to be such a relation as classical identity? Put the question this way. Call a predicate *subdominant* if it is dominated by every RI-predicate other than those that, like "same surman", are redundant; Is it a part of the *concept* of classical identity (whether or not any relation in fact falls under that concept) that it be subdominant?

If the answer to this question is Yes, then RI-logic is an interesting topic only if classical identity does not exist. (And it seems to be the consensus among the friends of relative identity that classical identity does not exist.)

I am unsure what to say about the subdominance of classical identity. I know of only three relevant arguments, and they are inconclusive.

First, one might argue that if there is such a relation as classical identity, then, for any non-redundant RI-predicate "is the same *N* as", the following equivalence should hold:

$$x \text{ is the same } N \text{ as } y \leftrightarrow .x \text{ is an } N \ \& \ x = y.$$

And it obviously follows from this that every non-redundant RI-predicate

dominates classical identity. I think that those friends of relative identity who assume that their position is incompatible with the existence of classical identity have something like this in mind. (But why exactly should one accept this equivalence? Call a count-noun *proper* if, unlike "surman", it does not form a redundant RI-predicate. Why is it incoherent to suppose that, where *N* is a proper count-noun, *x* is an *N*, *y* is an *N*, *x* and *y* are the same *N*, and *x* and *y* are not absolutely identical?)

Secondly, one might argue *ad hominem* that the philosopher who believes that RI-logic is an interesting topic should not mind denying that classical identity is subdominant. After all, he must hold that *some* predicate is not subdominant. Now the really puzzling thing – one might argue – is that *any*predicate should fail to be subdominant. Once someone has admitted *that*, he should have no scruples about saying of any *given* predicate – classical identity, for example – that *it* is not subdominant.

Thirdly, one might point out that all the theorems of the logic of classical identity follow from "$x = x$" and "$x = y \rightarrow (F\ldots x\ldots \leftrightarrow F\ldots y\ldots)$" by quantifier logic. This fact suggests that only two properties are constitutive of the *idea* of classical identity: identity is *universally reflexive* and it *forces absolute***(p.233)** *indiscernibility*. And it is hard to see how these two properties might entail subdominance.

As I have said, I regard these arguments as inconclusive. In the sequel, therefore, I shall neither assume that classical identity exists nor that it does not exist.

We may note in this connection that it is possible for one to employ in certain contexts a symbol that behaves like the classical identity-sign without thereby committing oneself to the existence of classical identity. The contexts in which one may do this can be described as follows. Let *G* be a one-place predicate. Let us say that an RI-predicate *I G-dominates* a predicate *F* if all sentences of the form

$$G\alpha\ \&\ G\beta.\rightarrow[I\alpha\beta\rightarrow(F\ldots\alpha\ldots\leftrightarrow F\ldots\beta\ldots)]$$

are true. Suppose that, for the duration of a certain project, one is willing to restrict the scope of one's generalizations to objects that satisfy *G*. And suppose that one believes (1) that all of the RI-predicates one is employing in this project G-dominate all of the predicates one is employing, and (2) that, for any*x*, if *Gx*, then for some RI-predicate *I* that one is employing, *Ixx*. Then one may introduce a predicate "=" as the disjunction of all the RI-predicates that one is employing

and one may regard this predicate as governed by the two rules that define the logical behavior of the classical identity-sign. (That is, Reflexivity and the Indiscernibility of Identicals; see above.)

A philosopher who denies the existence of classical, absolute identity may find materials in the procedure I have outlined for an explanation of the fact that most philosophers and logicians have assumed that there is such a relation as classical identity. Might it not be that all commonly used RI-predicates G-dominate all commonly used predicates, where G is some predicate that comprehends all the objects that philosophers typically think of as central or paradigm cases of "objects"? If this were so, it would go a long way toward explaining how a belief in absolute identity could be pervasive but incorrect. (One might compare an explanation of this sort with the usual explanations of how a belief in absolute, Euclidean space could be pervasive but incorrect. Each sort of explanation postulates a natural but unwarranted inference from "local" features of the world to the features of the world as a whole.)

Now whether or not there is such a relation as classical identity, RI-logic is of interest only if there is an RI-predicate *I* (from now on, when making generalizations about RI-predicates, I shall regard the qualification "non-redundant" as "understood") and a predicate F such that *I* does not dominate *F*. We should have such an *I* and F if there were some count-noun of English *N* (from now on, when making generalizations about count-nouns, I shall regard the qualification "proper" as "understood") such that, for some *x* and *y*, *x* is green and *y* is not green and *x* is the same *N* as *y*. (In this case "is the same *N*as" fails to dominate "green".) Or we should have such an *I* and F if there were two count-nouns of English, M and *N*, such that, for some *x* and *y*, *x* is an M and *x* is an *N* and *y* is an M and *y* is an *N* and *x* is the same *N* as *y* and *x* is not the **(p.234)** same *M* as *y*. (In this second case, "is the same N as" fails to dominate "is the same *M* as". This second case has been said to be a necessary and sufficient condition for RI-logic being of interest; but it is not necessary, as the first case shows.)

How plausible is it to suppose that there is some RI-predicate that fails to dominate some predicate? (In the present section I shall examine the question whether there are such predicates insofar as this question touches on objects belonging to the natural world. Theological speculations are reserved for section 4.) The literature on relative identity suggests several candidates for this position, several of which are worthy of careful examination. I pick one as representative. It is sometimes said that there are such things as "quantities of

clay" (and of other stuffs, of course). A clay vase is a quantity of clay, a clay statue is a quantity of clay, and an unformed lump of clay that no potter or sculptor has touched is a quantity of clay. ("Quantity" does not here mean *amount*; "quantity" is like "lump", only even less demanding: a lump has to be in one piece – one would suppose – while a quantity may be scattered to the four corners of the earth.) It is sometimes suggested that the RI-predicate "is the same quantity of clay as" does not dominate, e.g., "is less than one hour old". It is suggested that it may be that there is a vase and there is a lump of clay (currently vase-shaped and coincident with the vase) such that the former is the same quantity of clay as the latter, despite the fact that the vase is less than one hour old and the lump more than one hour old. (For no vase could ever have been of a radically different shape – spherical, say – while a lump of clay might be vase-shaped now and have been spherical yesterday.) A philosopher who doubts the philosophical utility of the concept of relative identity will not be moved by these suggestions, however. He will contend that there is no need to suppose that "is the same quantity of clay as" fails to dominate "is less than one hour old". He will suggest that it is simpler to suppose (a) that there is such a relation as absolute identity, (b) that "*x* is the same quantity of clay as*y*" is equivalent to "*x* is a quantity of clay & $x = y$", and (c) that it *can* be true of a vase that *it* was once spherical; he will suggest that a clay vase is (absolutely) just a quantity of clay; one that was once (say) spherical and is now vase-shaped. In other words, this philosopher will suggest that "being a vase" is a*status* that a quantity of clay may temporarily acquire, much as "being a president" is a status that Ronald Reagan has temporarily acquired: Just as the President existed before he was a president, so the vase existed before it was a vase. I have not the space to consider all the cases that have been devised by philosophers in the attempt to show that there are non-dominant RI-predicates (ones having only natural objects in their extensions), but I think that the enemies of relative identity will be able to produce replies to them as effective as the reply I have suggested for the case of the clay vase. I can find nothing in the natural world to suggest that there are any non-dominant RI-predicates. As far as I am able to tell, RI-logic has no utility outside Christian theology. (This need not raise doubts about the coherency of Christian doctrine. Like quantum mechanics and the more rarefied parts of pure mathematics, the doctrine of the Trinity treats of objects extraordinarily different from the objects**(p.235)** of ordinary experience, ones that are perhaps *sui generis*. If it could be shown that a certain exotic non-classical logic had an application – if anywhere – in quantum physics or in the study of the non-constructive infinite, this result would not necessarily raise doubts about the coherency of quantum physics or the non-constructive infinite. Of course,

someone who already believed that one of these things was incoherent might regard this result as providing indirect confirmation for his belief: if, e.g., quantum mechanics is hospitable to a logic in which conjunction fails to distribute over disjunction – he might say – that's one more strike against quantum mechanics.)

Let us close our discussion of RI-logic with a brief look at the topic of singular reference. The language of RI-logic contains no singular terms. Given our decision to be non-committal about the existence of classical, absolute identity, this is no accident. The philosopher who eschews classical, absolute identity must also eschew singular terms, for the idea of a singular term is – at least in currently orthodox semantical theory – inseparably bound to the classical semantical notion of reference or denotation; and this notion, in its turn, is inseparably bound to the idea of classical identity. It is a part of the orthodox semantical concept of reference that reference is a many – one relation. And it is a part of the idea of a many – one relation – or of a one – one relation, for that matter – that if *x* bears such a relation to *y* and bears it to z, then *y* and z are absolutely identical. (That's what it says on the label.) For example, if “the tallest man” denotes *y* and denotes z, then *y* and z are absolutely identical. (This point “works” better in respect of descriptions than in respect of proper names. The friends of singular terms must concede that, e.g., “John Frederick Harris” might, and in fact does, name numerically distinct objects. Let us ignore this awkward fact, which can be dealt with in various ways, and remarkably messy and *ad hoc* ways they are, too.)

If the RI-logician has no singular terms at his disposal, how shall he accomplish singular reference? Must he be content with general statements? In a sense, the answers are: He shan’t accomplish it, and he must be content with them. In *what* sense does he face these unpleasant consequences? In any sense of “singular reference” in which the idea of singularity is infected with the idea of classical, absolute identity. This is pretty evident when you think about it. Nevertheless, the RI-logician is not without resources. He has the resources to accomplish *relative* singular reference, a sort of singularity of reference that stands to classical, absolute singularity of reference – the sort that is supposedly accomplished by singular terms – as relative identity stands to classical, absolute identity. Relative singular reference can be accomplished by a device suggested by Russell's theory of descriptions. It is illustrated by the following examples of translations of English sentences containing (what are traditionally called) definite descriptions into the language of RI-logic.

The king is bald

∃x (*x* is a king & ∀y (*y* is a king → *y* is the same king as *x*) & *x* is bald).

**(p.236)** The queen is the monarch

$$\exists x\,(x \text{ is a queen } \&\ x \text{ is a monarch } \&$$
$$\forall y\,(y \text{ is a queen} \rightarrow y \text{ is the same queen as } x)\ \&$$
$$\forall y\,(y \text{ is a monarch} \rightarrow y \text{ the same monarch as } x)).$$

Or, at any rate, this is one way to translate these two English sentences into the language of RI-logic; this is the way to do it without making any suppositions about dominance. But if we assume, e.g., that "is the same man as" dominates "is the same king as", it might be more natural and useful to translate "The king is bald" as

∃*x* (*x* is a king & ∀*y* (*y* is a king → *y* is the same man as x) & *x* is bald).

## 4

In the present section, I shall show how to translate certain central theses of Trinitarian theology into the language of RI-logic. The vocabulary we shall employ would hardly do for devotional purposes, but (I hope) we can use it to express certain of the *propositions* that are expressed in devotional discourse about the Trinity. It will not be difficult to show that what we want to say about the Trinity in this vocabulary is free from formal contradiction.

We have, to start with, two undefined RI-predicates:

is the same being as[16]

is the same person as.

We shall not assume that either of these predicates dominates the other. And, of course, we shall not assume that either of them is eliminable in favor of dominant RI-predicates and ordinary predicates. It is of particular importance that we not assume that "same being" dominates "same person", for that would entail that if *x* is the same being as *y* and *x* is a person, then *x* is the same person as y. (In at least one other context – the theology of the Incarnation – it would be important not to assume that "same person" dominates "same being".)

I do not refrain from defining these predicates because I think that there is any

particular difficulty about what it is to be a being or a person. Something is a being (is the same being as something) if it has causal powers. A being is a person (something that is the same being as something is also the same person as something) if it is self-aware and has beliefs and plans and acts on the basis of those beliefs to execute those plans. (As Boethius says, a person is an individual substance of a rational nature.) But to say this much is not to give a general account of "*same* being" or "*same* person". If we regard a definition of a sentence **(p.237)** in the austere fashion of logicians as a recipe for eliminating that sentence *salva extensione* in favor of another sentence containing the same variables free, then the account I have given of "person" and "being" provides us with definitions of "*x* is the same being as *x*" (or, equivalently, of "*x* is the same being as something") and "*x* is the same person as *x*", but not of "*x* is the same being as *y*" or "*x* is the same person as *y*".[17] (It allows us, for example, to define "*x* is the same being as *x*" as "*x* has causal powers".)

If we believed that there were such a relation as classical, absolute identity, and if we believed that this relation was subdominant, then we *could* extract from our account of "person" and "being" definitions of "same person" and "same being". For example:

$x$ is the same being as $y =_{df} x$ has causal powers & $x = y$.

The reason that the existence and subdominance of classical identity would enable us so to turn a definition of "*x* is the same being as *x*" into a definition of "*x* is the same being as *y*" is that the subdominance of classical identity (its domination by all RI-predicates) entails the conditional

$x$ is the same being as $y \rightarrow x = y$;

and from this conditional one may infer (by the rules of the classical logic of identity) the biconditional

$x$ is the same being as $y \leftrightarrow .x$ is the same being as $x$ & $x = y$.

But if the above definition of "is the same being as" were correct, it would follow that if a person *x* and a person *y* are the same being, then *x* and *y* are the *same* **(p.238)** person.[18] The Trinitarian must, therefore, assume either that classical, absolute identity does not exist, or that, if it does exist, it is not dominated by "is the same being as". (Or, at least, he must make one or the other of these assumptions if his thinking about the Trinity is to be based on a logic of relative identity. This result is essentially an application to the case of a relative-identity treatment of the Trinity of a point made in section 3 about relative-identity treatments of anything: If there is such a relation as classical, absolute

identity, and if it is subdominant, then all RI-predicates are dominant.) Nothing, of course, prevents him from introducing by the device outlined in section 3 a predicate that behaves within a certain restricted area of his discourse – say, the part that does not have to do with the Trinity – in the way the classical identity-predicate is supposed to behave throughout all discourse.

We shall have several ordinary predicates, which will be introduced as we need them. The first is "is divine". A *definiens* for "*x* is divine" might look something like this:

> *x* is necessarily existent; essentially almighty, all-knowing, and perfect in love and wisdom; essentially such that nothing contingent would exist unless *x* willed it.

But you may have your own ideas about how to define this predicate. Since any reasonable list of the attributes constitutive of divinity must include attributes implying power and knowledge, the following would seem to be a conceptual truth, and I shall assume it to be such:

CT1 $\forall x$ ($x$ is divine $\rightarrow$.$x$ is a being & $x$ is a person).

Indeed, the first conjunct of the consequent is, strictly speaking, redundant, since any person is, necessarily, a being:

CT2 $\forall x$ ($x$ is a person $\rightarrow$ $x$ is a being).

It follows from CT1 that something is a divine Person if and only if it is a divine Being:

CT3 $\forall x$ ($x$ is a person & $x$ is divine. $\leftrightarrow$ .$x$ is a being & $x$ is divine).[19]

19

**(p.239)** We shall assume that "is the same being as" dominates "is divine"; that is we shall assume

CT4 $\forall x \forall y$ ($x$ is the same being as $y \rightarrow$ ($x$ is divine $\leftrightarrow$ $y$ is divine)).

The most important consequence of CT4 is that if a being is divine, then any being who is the same being as that being is divine. (We shall not assume that "same person" dominates "divine". We shall not need this assumption, and it might cause difficulties for the theology of the Incarnation, since, on the obvious interpretation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, there is an *x* such that *x* is divine and there is a *y* such that *y* is not divine and *x* is the same person as *y*. Owing to

similar considerations, we should not want to assume that “same person” dominated such predicates as “is a man” and “was born in the world”.) It follows from CT1 and CT4 that if *x* is a divine Person and *y* is the same being as *x*, then *y* is *a*person. It does not, of course, follow that *y* is the *same* person as *x*.

Let us now introduce abbreviations for “same being”, “same person”, and “divine”:

$\underline{B}\alpha\beta$ $\alpha$ is the same being as $\beta$

$\underline{P}\alpha\beta$ $\alpha$ is the same person as $\alpha$

$D\alpha$ $\alpha$ is divine.

(In virtue of CT1, “*Dx*” may be read, “*x* is a divine Person” or “*x* is a divine Being”. If “a God” is equivalent to “a divine Being” – as I suppose it to be -, “*Dx*” may also be read “*x* is a God”.) We underline “B” and “P” to remind us that they abbreviate RI-predicates. We shall further abbreviate, e.g., “$\underline{B}$xx” as “$\underline{B}$x ”.

We may express using only these three predicates three central propositions of Trinitarian theology:

(1) There is (exactly) one God

$$\exists x\,(Dx \,\&\, \forall y(Dy \rightarrow \underline{B}\,yx))$$

(2) There are (exactly) three divine Persons

$$\exists x \exists y \exists z\,(Dx \,\&\, Dy \,\&\, Dz \,\&\, \sim \underline{P}xy \,\&\, \sim \underline{P}xz \,\&\, \sim \underline{P}yz \,\&\, \forall w(Dw \rightarrow .\underline{P}wx \text{ v } \underline{P}wy \text{ v } \underline{P}wz))$$

(3) There are three divine Persons in one divine Being

$$[\text{There are three divine Persons}] \,\&\, \forall x \forall y(Dx \,\&\, Dy. \rightarrow \underline{B}xy).$$

It is easy to see that (1) through (3) and CT1 through CT4 together compose a set of sentences from which no contradiction can be derived in RI-logic.

To show this, let us consider the following reinterpretation of our three predicates. (Admittedly, it is rather unedifying; it has been chosen for its mnemonic virtues.)

$\underline{B}\alpha\beta$ $\alpha$ is the same breed as $\beta$

$\underline{P}\alpha\beta$ α is the same price as β

*Dα* α is a dog

**(p.240)** Now assume that there are exactly three dogs and that nothing besides these dogs has either a breed or a price. Assume that these dogs are for sale at different prices and that each is a purebred dachshund. Given these assumptions, it is easy to verify by inspection that the sentences (1) through (3) and CT1 through CT4 are true on the proposed reinterpretation of "B", "P", and "D".

This reinterpretation of our predicates shows that no formal contradiction can be deduced from (1) through (3) and CT1 through CT4 by standard quantifier logic, since (by a well-known property of quantifier logic), no formal contradiction can be deduced in that logic from a set of sentences that are true on some interpretation. The only rules of RI-logic other than those of quantifier logic are Symmetry and Transitivity. Since "*x* is the same breed as *y*" and "*x* is the same price as *y*" express symmetrical and transitive relations, it follows that no formal contradiction can be deduced from (1) through (3) and CT1 through CT4 by the rules of RI-logic. (Nothing I have said should be taken to imply that "is the same breed as" and "is the same price as" are relative-identity predicates. In fact these predicates are *not* RI-predicates, at least as we are using them. On this point, see our discussion of "is the same color as" on p. 226.)

Our consistency result shows that "Something is a divine Person if and only if it is a divine Being" [CT3] is formally consistent with "There are three divine Persons" [(2)] and "There is one divine Being" [(1)]. This formal result can be understood philosophically as follows. Without classical identity, there is no absolute counting: there is only counting by Ns. For example, if propositions (1) and (2) are true: Counting divine Beings by beings, there is one; counting divine Persons by beings, there is one; counting divine Beings by persons, there are three; counting divine Persons by persons, there are three. But if someone asks us how many divine Beings there are, it is presumably a "conversational implicature" of his question that he wishes us to count divine Beings by beings – that is, by the count-noun *he* used. And the same goes for, "How many divine Persons are there?" That is why "There is one divine Being" is a natural English translation of the symbolic sentence (1) and "There are three divine Persons" is a natural English translation of the symbolic sentence (2). If, on the other hand, there is such a thing as absolute identity, there is such a thing as absolute counting. For example, if absolute identity exists, it follows from (2) and CT3 that there are three divine Beings and three divine Persons, counting absolutely. If absolute identity not only exists but is subdominant, an absolute count of Ns will force the same count on all relative counts of Ns. (In that case, of course,

CT3, (1), and (2) could not all be true.) If absolute identity exists but is not subdominant – if, in particular, it is not dominated by "same being" – then it may be true that there is one divine Being counting by beings and, at the same time, true that there are three divine Beings counting absolutely.

Let us now turn to the problem of singular reference.

We must find some way, using only the resources of RI-logic, to do the work of the English singular terms "God", "the Father", "the Son", and "the Holy Spirit".[20] **(p.241)** We have seen how to supply a relative-identity surrogate for classical definite descriptions. The singular term "God" should obviously be thought of as an abbreviation for "the divine Being" or (like the Arabic "Allah") "the God". Thus, using our relative-identity surrogate for classical definite descriptions, we may translate the English sentence "God made us" into the language of our RI-logic as

$$\exists x\,(Dx \,\&\, \forall y(Dy \rightarrow \underline{B}yx) \,\&\, x \text{ made us}).$$

It will be convenient to abbreviate "$Dx$ & $\forall y$ $(Dy \rightarrow \underline{B}yx)$ " as "$Gx$" (and similarly for other variables). "$Gx$" may be read "$x$ is one God" (*cf*. Deut. 6:4) or "$x$ is the only God" or "$x$ is the divine Being". The word "God" in English is sometimes a common noun ("There is one God") and sometimes a proper noun ("In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"). When "God" is a common noun in English, it is a count-noun. In the special vocabulary of the present section of this paper, the work done by the English count-noun "God" is done by the predicate "is divine": "There is a God" is read "Something is divine". The work done by the English proper noun "God" is also done by "is divine": to say what is said by an English sentence of the form "God is ø", we say "The only God (the one God, the divine Being) is ø". Or, making use of the above abbreviation, "$\exists x(Gx \& øx)$".

But how shall we translate English sentences containing the terms "the Father", "the Son", and "the Holy Spirit"?[21] It is a commonplace of Trinitarian theology that the Persons of the Trinity are individuated by the relations they bear to one another. Two relations, the Creeds tell us, individuate the Persons; we may express them by these predicates:

α begets β

α proceeds from $\beta$ through γ.

(I hope that the wording of the second of these is acceptable to both the Eastern and the Western Churches.)[22] These two relations hold only within the Godhead:

CT5 $\forall x \forall y (x \text{ begets } y \rightarrow .Dx \,\&\, Dy)$

**(p.242)**

CT6 $\forall x \forall y \forall z (x \text{ proceeds from } y \text{ through } z \rightarrow .Dx \,\&\, Dy \,\&\, Dz).$

Every divine Person enters into the "procession" relation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CT7} \quad \forall x (Dx \rightarrow \quad & .(\exists y \exists z\, x \text{ proceeds from } y \text{ through } z) v \\ & (\exists y \exists z\, y \text{ proceeds from } x \text{ through } z) v \\ & (\exists y \exists z\, y \text{ proceeds from } z \text{ through } x)). \end{aligned}$$

If x, y, and *z* enter into the "procession" relation with one another, then *x*, *y*, and *z* are distinct Persons:

CT8 $\forall x \forall y \forall z (x \text{ proceeds from } y \text{ through } z \rightarrow .\sim \underline{P}xy \,\&\, \sim \underline{P}xz \,\&\, \sim \underline{P}yz).$[23]

[23]

If *x*, *y*, and z enter into the "procession" relation with one another, then no other Persons do (nor do *x*, *y*, and *z* enter into it in more than one way):

CT9 $\forall x \forall y \forall z \forall t \forall u \forall v$ ($x$ proceeds from $y$ through $z$ & $t$ proceeds from $u$ through $v$. $\rightarrow .\underline{P}xt \,\&\, \underline{P}yu \,\&\, \underline{P}zv$).

The two relations, procession and begetting, are not independent:

CT10 $\forall x \forall y \forall z (x \text{ proceeds from } y \text{ through } z \rightarrow y \text{ begets } z)$

CT11 $\forall x \forall y \exists z (x \text{ begets } y \rightarrow z \text{ proceeds from } x \text{ through } y).$[24]

[24]

Begetting has features analogous to the features ascribed to procession in CT8 and CT9:

CT12 $\forall x \forall y (x \text{ begets } y \rightarrow \sim \underline{P}xy)$

CT13 $\forall x \forall y \forall z \forall w (x \text{ begets } y \,\&\, z \text{ begets } w. \rightarrow .\underline{P}xz \,\&\, \underline{P}yw).$[25]

[25]

It will be convenient to introduce three one-place predicates by definition:

$$\alpha \text{ begets} = df\ \exists\beta\ \alpha \text{ begets } \beta$$
$$\alpha \text{ is begotten} = df\ \exists\beta\ \beta \text{ begets } \alpha$$
$$\alpha \text{ proceeds} = df\ \exists\beta\exists\gamma\ \alpha \text{ proceeds from } \beta \text{ through } \gamma.$$

**(p.243)** Propositions CT5–13 entail that each of these predicates is satisfied (if at all) by a divine Person; that if *x* and *y* satisfy any given one of them, then *Pxy;* and that if *x* satisfies one of them and *y*another, then ∼*P*̲*xy*. We may therefore treat "the Father", "the Son", and "the Holy Spirit" as equivalent to, respectively, "the Person who begets", "the Person who is begotten" and "the Person who proceeds". More exactly, we shall read, e.g., "The Father made us" as

$$\exists x(x \text{ begets } \&\ \forall y(y \text{ begets} \rightarrow \underline{P}yx)\ \&\ x \text{ made us}).$$

Let us abbreviate "*x* begets & ∀y(y begets → P̲ *yx*)" as "*Fx*"("*x* is the Father"). Let us abbreviate "*x* is begotten & ∀*y*(*y* is begotten → P̲ *yx*)" as "*Sx*" ("*x* is the Son"). Let us abbreviate "*x* proceeds & ∀y(y proceeds → P̲ *yx*)" as "*Hx*" ("*x* is the Holy Spirit"). (And similarly for other variables.)

I now present a list of Trinitarian sentences of English and some proposed translations into our formal vocabulary. All of the translations are provable from (1) through (3), and CT1 through CT13. Note, by the way, that (2) and (3) are provable from (1) and the CTs.

(4) God is the same being as the Father

$$\exists x\ \exists y(Gx\ \&\ Fy\ \&\ \underline{B}xy).$$

(5) God is a person[26]

$$\exists x(Gx\ \&\ \underline{P}x).$$

(6) God is the same person as the Father

$$\exists x\ \exists y(Gx\ \&\ Fy\ \&\ \underline{P}xy).$$

(7) God is the same person as the Son

$$\exists x\ \exists y(Gx\ \&\ Sy\ \&\ \underline{P}xy).$$

(8) The Son is the not the same person as the Father

$$\sim\exists x\ \exists y(Fx\ \&\ Sy\ \&\ \sim\underline{P}xy).$$

[27]

Or we might write (giving "not" "narrow scope"),

$$\exists x\ \exists y(Fx\ \&\ Sy\ \&\ \sim\underline{P}xy).$$

[28]

**(p.244)** We should note that (6), (7), and both versions of (8) are – formally, at least -consistent. More generally: let S be the set of sentences containing (1) through (8) and CT1 through CT13; we can show that no formal contradiction is deducible from S in RI-logic.[29] We can show this by an extension of the "three dogs" reinterpretation of "B", "*P*", and "D" that we employed earlier. Reinterpret our "Trinitarian" predicates as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| α begets *β* | *α* barks at *β* |
| *α* proceeds from *β* through *γ* | α prances from *β* to Γ |

Now let our three dogs be *A*, B, and *C*. Suppose that *C* prances from *A* to *B* and does no other prancing and that nothing besides *C* prances. Suppose that *A* is barking at *B* and at nothing else and that nothing besides *A* barks. Given these assumptions, and our earlier assumptions about prices and breeds, it is easy (if somewhat tedious) to verify by inspection that all the members of **S** are true on the proposed reinterpretation. Note that the reinterpretation for "*Px*" in (5) should be "*x* is the same price as *x*". It follows that no formal contradiction is deducible from **S** in RI-logic.

In order to verify by inspection that all members of **S** are true, it is necessary to remove the abbreviations in (4)–(8). For example, here is sentence (4) in unabbreviated form:

$$\exists x \exists y (Dx \,\&\, \forall z (Dz \rightarrow \underline{B}zx) \,\&\, \exists w (y \text{ begets } w) \,\&\, \forall z (\exists w\, z \text{ begets } w. \rightarrow \underline{P}zy) \,\&\, \underline{B}\, xy)$$

The tedium of verifying (4)–(8) on the "three dogs" reinterpretation can be somewhat reduced if we supply appropriate "derived" reinterpretations for the defined predicates "G", "F", and "S":

| | |
|---|---|
| Gα | α is a member of the only breed of dog |
| Fα | α barks and any barking dog is the same price as α |
| Sα | α is barked at and any dog that is barked at is the same price as α. |

It is important to realize that the "three dogs" reinterpretation of our predicates is not intended to provide a model (in any sense) for the Trinity. For one thing, as we have noted, "is the same price as" and "is the same breed as" are not even RI-predicates. The only purpose of the reinterpretation is to show that for no sentence is it possible to derive both that sentence and its negation from **S** by

Transitivity, Symmetry, and the rules of quantifier logic. The argument is essentially this: If a contradiction can be formally deduced from **S**, then the story of our three dogs is inconsistent; but that story is obviously consistent.

Does it seem paradoxical that (6), (7), and (8) are consistent? We must remember that it is an essential part of the position we are exploring that the English sentences (6), (7), and (8) do not wear their real, underlying logical **(p.245)** structures on their sleeves: They are not really of the forms "*P̲gf*", "*P̲gs*", and "∼*P̲fs*". According to this position, the underlying logical structures of these sentences are given by their RI-translations; and no sentence in the language of RI-logic could be of these forms, for that language contains no terms but variables. We should note that "∼(*P̲xy* & *P̲xz* & ∼P̲yz)" is an easily proved theorem of RI-logic, and is, therefore, by our consistency result, formally consistent with (6), (7), and (8). The tendency to think that the consistency of (6), (7), and (8) is paradoxical is rooted, I think, in our tendency to suppose that "God", "the Father", and "the Son" are singular terms (in the orthodox semantical sense).

Other "paradoxical" groups of sentences can be found. For example:

(9) God is begotten
$\exists x$ ($Gx$ & $x$ is begotten)
(10) God is unbegotten
$\exists x$ ($Gx$ &∼$x$ is begotten).

These two sentences are formally consistent with, and, in fact, provable from, the members of **S**. Are they theologically acceptable? Well, one sometimes sees references in Christian theological writing (usually in rhetorical opposition) to begotten and unbegotten Deity, so I suppose that they are.

A perhaps more serious problem of the same sort is raised by the Incarnation. It seems plausible to define "*x* is incarnate" as "∃y(yis a human being &P̲xy)". On this reading, however, "God is unincarnate" – "∃*x(Gx* & ∼∃*y(y* is a human being & *P̲xy))*" – will "come out true."[30] I think that the best course for the philosopher who proposes to express the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in the language of RI-logic is to insist that this sentence is literally true but misleading. He will be able to adduce in his support the demonstrable facts that (if Jesus of Nazareth is the same person as one of the divine Persons), then "God is incarnate" is true and "it is not the case that God is incarnate" is false. But I can do no more than allude to the problems raised by the Incarnation.

I have shown how to represent certain Trinitarian sentences of English in our formal vocabulary, and I have shown that no contradiction can be deduced in RI-logic from the formal translations of these sentences. I note in passing that there are interesting sentences expressible in terms of the predicates we have at our disposal that allow us to make distinctions that cannot be made easily in English. Consider this sentence

(11) *∃x(Gx & Fx)*.

This sentence expresses a truth; or at least it is provable in RI-logic from the members of **S**. How shall we express its content in English? Not, certainly, as "God **(p.246)** is the same being as the Father" or "God is the same person as the Father", for these are the equivalents, respectively, of the RI-sentences (4) and (6). I would suggest: "God and the Father are one absolutely". It might be said that the ideas conjured up by the predicate "are one absolutely" are contrary to the spirit of RI-logic. Perhaps so; but sentence (11) is a perfectly respectable sentence, and I am at a loss for a better informal expression of its content. We may note that if my suggestion for translating (11) into English is followed out consistently, the English sentence "God and the Son are one absolutely" will express a truth, and the English sentence "The Father and the Son are one absolutely" will express a falsehood.[31]

I have said that in this paper I should risk Tritheism. Have I fallen into Tritheism? What can be said with certainty is this. The sentence (1)

$$\exists x(Dx \,\&\, \forall y(Dy \rightarrow \underline{B}yx)),$$

which – it may be argued, at any rate – expresses the thesis of monotheism, does not yield a formal contradiction in RI-logic; nor does the whole set of sentences S that we have "endorsed," and to which (1) belongs, yield a contradiction. Consider, moreover, the sentence

$$\exists x\exists y(Dx \,\&\, Dy \,\&\, \sim\underline{B}xy),$$

which – it may be argued, at any rate – expresses the thesis that there are two or more Gods. The negation of this sentence can be formally deduced from (1). But these results do not protect us from all the dangers of Tritheism. Perhaps the most objectionable -I do not say the only objectionable – feature of polytheism is that if one believes that Zeus and Poseidon are real and are two divine beings and two divine persons, one must admit that one has no guarantee that Zeus and Poseidon will not demand contrary things of one. And there is nothing in the notion of "same being," taken by itself, that entails that two divine Persons who

are the same Being will not, despite their being the same Being, demand contrary things of one. It must certainly be a feature of any adequate Trinitarian theology that whatever is demanded of one by any divine Person is demanded by all, and, more generally, that the idea of a clash of divine wills is as impossible as the idea of a round square. I am pointing out only that the impossibility of a clash of wills among the divine Persons is not a simple consequence of their being one Being. (It may be that, owing to their perfect knowledge and wisdom, no two divine Persons could will differently. If so, this has nothing in particular to do with the unity of being of the divine Persons: the same consequence would follow if there were two divine Persons who were also two beings.)

I believe that the (conceptual) danger of a clash of divine wills can be eliminated in a conceptually satisfying (i.e., non-arbitrary) way if we accept what I shall call the Principle of the Uniformity of the Divine Nature. This principle turns on the notion of a non-Trinitarian – or, as I shall say, "normal" – predicate applicable to God. **(p.247)** Roughly speaking, a normal predicate is one that someone who believed that there was exactly one divine Person might coherently apply to that Person.[32] For example: "made the world"; "is compassionate"; "spake by the Prophets". The Principle of the Uniformity of the Divine Nature is simply this: "is the same being as" dominates all normal predicates. Formally (where "N" represents any normal predicate), all sentences of the following form are true:

$$\underline{B}\alpha\beta \rightarrow (N\ldots\alpha\ldots \leftrightarrow N\ldots\beta\ldots).$$

(We may note that CT4 is of this form.) Since such predicates as "commands Moses to return to Egypt" and "tells Saul to enter Damascus" are normal, the Principle of the Uniformity of the Divine Nature rules out the possibility of a Homeric clash of divine wills. And it rules out a good many other things; it entails, for example, that it is false that the Father made the world and the Son did not. It is a way of saying formally what the *Quicunque Vult* says in the words, "*Qualis Pater, talis Filius, talis et Spiritus Sanctus*"[33] – although the writer of those words was not thinking primarily of the relations God bears to his creation, but rather of his *intrinsic* normal attributes.[34]

I will close by mentioning some important philosophical questions about the Trinity that I have not touched on. Consider, for example, the relations that individuate the Persons. Are the Persons individuated *only* by these relations, as most of the classical Trinitarian theologians seem to have supposed? Or might it be that each of the Persons has certain intrinsic (non-relational) attributes that are

not shared by the others? Put the question this way. The Father begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. Why do these two relations hold among the three divine Persons in just *this* way? Is it a brute fact, the three Persons being absolutely descriptively identical except for the manner in which they are related? Or does each of the three Persons have a proper nature of his own, in addition to the nature (Divinity) that is common to all three, in which these relations are "grounded"? To say so might threaten the traditional doctrine of the Divine Simplicity. But the doctrine of purely relational individuation seems to imply the (surely repugnant) thesis that it is intrinsically possible that the Person who is in fact the Holy Spirit beget the Person who is in fact the Father.

A second problem we have not considered, but which has bulked large in the speculations of the great Trinitarian theologians, can be stated very succinctly: Why *three* Persons? I could go on at some length about the problems I have not considered, but I will not. I have been concerned in this paper to touch only on those features of Trinitarian theology most closely connected with problems of counting, identity, and predication.

**(p.248)** Even in this limited area of investigation, I have left the mystery of the Holy Trinity untouched. It is one thing to suggest that "is the same being as" does not dominate "is the same person as". It is another thing to explain how this could be. I have no explanation of this fact (if it is a fact); nor do I think that we could hope to discover one in this life, in which we see only disordered reflections in a mirror. One day, perhaps, we shall see face to face and know as we are known.[35]

Notes:

(1) Paul VI, "Credo of the People of God" (pronounced 30 June 1968), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 60 (1968), 9.

(2) Keith Yandell has called my attention to the following passage from St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* (1, 5, 5):

> Thus there are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and each is God and at the same time all are one God; and each of them is a full substance, and at the same time all are one substance. The Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. But the Father is the Father uniquely; the Son is the Son uniquely; and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit uniquely.

> Yandell has also called my attention to the marvelously splenetic Socinian attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity that are cited in Leonard Hodgson's *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), pp. 219 ff. I wish I had the space to reproduce them all. Here is my favorite, from a work that was (understandably) published anonymously in 1687. It has been ascribed to the notorious Socinian John Biddle.
>
> You may add yet more absurdly, that there are three persons who are *severally and each of them true God*, and yet there is but one true God: this is *an Error* in counting or numbering; which, when stood in, is of all others the most brute and inexcusable, and not to discern it is not to be a Man.

(3) Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, I, 1.

(4) The idea of drawing an analogy between a Christian mystery and the wave-particle duality is due to John Polkinghorne (formerly Professor of Mathematical Physics in Cambridge University, and now an Anglican parish priest). See his book of Christian apologetic *The Way the World Is* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdman's, 1983). Fr. Polkinghorne's position on the wave-particle duality is that quantum field theory shows how an electron can be both a wave and a particle (i.e., can be both diffracted on its way to a detector and give up its energy to the detector in a particle-like manner). My impression from reading popular works on quantum mechanics is that not all physicists and philosophers of physics are willing to say this. If there is indeed real disagreement on this point, I expect it is philosophical disagreement: disagreement about what counts as *really* having "shown how something can be." One man's "showing how something can be both *x* and *y*" is another man's "constructing a formalism that allows you to treat something as both *x* and *y* without getting into trouble." Fr. Polkinghorne, by the way, has written an excellent popular book on quantum mechanics, *The Quantum World* (New York: Longman, 1984).

(5) Some might prefer to say: to an explicit and systematic statement of that which is present implicitly and in an unsystematic form in scripture.

(6) I have paid special attention to "Identity" and "Identity – A Reply" in *Logic Matters* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp. 238–249, and to "Ontological Relativity and Relative Identity" in Milton K. Munitz, ed., *Logic and Ontology* (New York: New York University Press, 1973). On the matter of relative identity and the Trinity, my main sources are *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 72–81 and Peter Geach and G. E. M. Anscombe,

*Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 118–120. I do not claim that Geach would agree with everything I say about relative identity in this paper, either in the abstract or in relation to the Trinity.

(7) This has been attempted at least once before, by A. P. Martinich. See his papers, "Identity and Trinity," *The Journal of Religion* 58 (April 1978), pp. 169–181, and "God, Emperor, and Relative Identity," *Franciscan Studies* 39 (1979): pp. 180–191. The relative-identity treatment of Trinitarian doctrine of the present paper was devised when I was unaware of these papers; the two treatments are thus independent developments of Geach's work. My treatment differs from Martinich's principally in devoting a good deal of attention to the problem of translating English sentences containing the singular terms – at least they have the syntax of singular terms – "God", "the Father", "the Son", and "the Holy Spirit" into the language of relative identity. I do not accept any of Martinich's supposed examples of non-theological "cases of relative identity."

(8) The translation is that of *The Book of Common Prayer* (According to the Use of the Episcopal Church, New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 864f. In the Prayer Book of 1662, the *Quicunque Vult* is printed following the Order for Evening Prayer. The Latin text I have used (on the advice of Eleonore Stump) is that of J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), pp. 17–20. The Prayer Book translation is accurate enough (allowing for changes in English since 1549), although it sometimes departs from the literal sense of the Latin in aid of liturgical euphony. (For example, the title of the present paper, literally translated, would be "And yet [they are] not three Gods, but there is one God".) I do not know what Latin text Cranmer – or whoever – used, but it does not seem to have been significantly different from the text in Kelly's book. We may note that in several places the Creed makes use of a grammatical device that English idiom resists: the use of adjective as substantive: "And yet not three eternals [*aeterni*] but one eternal [*aeternus*]". "Three eternal *whats*?" the English speaker wants to ask. (After all, they *are* three eternal *personae*.) I take "*tres aeterni*" to be equivalent to "*tres substantiae aeternae*"; I would defend this reading on the basis of the earlier warning about "dividing the substance." It is possible that the earliest users of the Creed – and the Scholastics as well – would dispute my contention that there are, after all, three eternal *personae*, on the ground that this implies that the *aeternitas* of the three *personae* is "divided." I am not sure what that means, however. I mean only that there are three *personae* and that it is true of each that he is eternal. The eternity ascribed to each person can be "the same," though I am not sure what that is supposed to imply. I

certainly want to say that the word “eternal” is applied to each Person in the same*sense*, if that helps.

(9) *The Virtues*, p. 75.

(10) Geach cites Ps. 89:26, Ps. 2:7 (it is, of course, rather a controversial reading of these verses to regard them as describing exchanges between two Persons of the Trinity!), and John 17:5. My two citations represent not “intra-Trinitarian” discourse, but unreflective and incidental creedal and liturgical recognition of the personhood (in the ordinary sense) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The sources I cite are not supposed to be authoritative (the personal aspect of “by himself” has no basis in the Latin Creed, which says only “acknowledge each Person *singillatim* to be”) but merely typical.

(11) I have learned something from all of the following papers and books: John Perry, “The Same F,”*The Philosophical Review* 79 (1970); Eddy M. Zemach, “In Defense of Relative Identity,” *Philosophical Studies* 26 (1974); Nicholas Griffin, *Relative Identity* (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1977); John Perry, “Relative Identity and Number,” the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1978); Harold W. Noonan,*Objects and Identity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980); David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); William P. Alston and Jonathan Bennett, “Identity and Cardinality: Geach and Frege,” *The Philosophical Review* 93 (1984). But the first drafts of section 3 and 4 of the present paper were written before I had read any of these papers and books, and I have found no reason to revise anything I have said in the light of their content. I do not, of course, mean to imply that what is said in this paper supersedes all previous work on the subject; I mean only that what I say here about the concept of relative identity and its logic does not seem to me to require any revisions in the light of what I have read in the authors cited above.

(12) “To avoid accusations of provincialism, we should mention that the preferred status of English is a matter only of the authors’ convenience; the subsequent treatment would apply as well to French, German, or Coptic” (Donald Kalish and Richard Montague, *Logic: Techniques of Formal Reasoning*[New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964], p. 5).

The somewhat unusual employment of English predicates as items in the vocabulary of a formal logic will make our exposition more compact. Thereby we generate “directly” as theorems what Kalish and Montague (p. 9) call “literal English translations of theorems”, and it is these that we shall be primarily

interested in. The description of the content of our stock of English predicates that follows in the text is of no formal significance. As long as we restrict our attention to purely formal matters – the statement of formation-rules and rules of inference – we need assume nothing more definite than that we have gone through the class of English predicates and have picked out (somehow) a certain set of them to be our vocabulary items. We must also assume, of course, that each of the chosen predicates has a clear and definite number of "places." And we must assume that our two-place predicates have (somehow) been partitioned into two classes, the "ordinary two-place predicates" and the "relative-identity" predicates (*vide infra*). Exactly how these things are to be done is irrelevant to our statement of the formation- and inference-rules of RI-logic, which presupposes only that we have a stock of predicates and a partition of the two-place predicates.

In the text that follows, there are examples and illustrations that presuppose that particular English predicates (e.g., "is green") belong to the vocabulary of RI-logic. The specially scrupulous may wish to replace illustrative statements of the type "'x is green → *x* is green' is a theorem of RI-logic" with the corresponding statements of the type "On the assumption that 'is green' belongs to the vocabulary of RI-logic, 'x is green → *x* is green' is a theorem of RI-logic".

(13) Two sentences are equivalent in RI-logic if their biconditional is a theorem of RI-logic. In the present section, I shall assume that the reader is familiar with the usual conventions for omitting universal quantifiers.

(14) I shall not pretend to be careful about use and mention in the remainder of this paper. The content of general statements about words and symbols will be conveyed impressionistically.

(15) See the article "Identity" cited in n. 6.

(16) Or "is the same substance as" or "is the same *ousia* as". Geach employs the predicate "is the same God as" to do essentially the task that I assign to "is the same being as", as does Martinich in the articles cited in n. 7.

(17) I can imagine here someone making the following remarks: Say that a being that is self-aware, etc., is *rational*. You have said, in essence, that "person" means "rational being". But, then, by what we may call "the principle of intensional substitution",

x is the same person as *y* ↔ *x* is the same rational being as y.

But, evidently,

> x is the same rational being as *y* ↔. *x* is the same being as *y* & *x* is rational & *y* is rational.

It is obvious that “same being” dominates “rational”:

> x is the same being as *y* → (x is rational ↔ *y* is rational).

But from these three sentences there follows by RI-logic:

> x is the same being as *y* → (x is the same person as z ↔ *y* is the same person as z).

That is, “same being” dominates “same person”.

But I have not said that “person” means “rational being”; not if that entails that “person” and “rational being” can replace each other in any context *salva extensione*. I have said only that “*x* is the same person as x” and “*x* is the same being as *x* & *x* is rational” can replace each other in any context *salva extensione*.

(18) The subdominance of classical identity entails “*x* is the same being as *y* →(x = *x* ↔ *x* = *y)*”, since “*x* =*x*” does not contain “y” and “*x* = *y*” is like “*x* = *x*” except for containing a free occurrence of “*x* ” where “*x* = *x*” contains a free occurrence of “*x*”. “*x* = *x*” is a theorem of the logic of classical identity. From these two sentences the conditional in the text follows. The biconditional is proved as follows. *Left-to-right* assume the antecedent; “*x* = *y*” follows from the antecedent and the just-proved conditional; the other conjunct of the consequent, “*x* is the same being as *x*”, follows from “*x* = *y*” and the antecedent by Substitution of Identicals. *Right-to-left:* assume the antecedent; the consequent follows by Substitution of Identicals.

Suppose “*x* is the same being as *y*” means “*x* has causal powers & *x* = *y*”. If *x* is the same person as *x* (i.e., if *x* is a person), and if xis the same being as *y*, then it follows by Substitution of Identicals (since “*x* = *y*” follows from the definition of “*x* is the same being as *y*”), that *x* is the same person as *y*.

(19) “But doesn’t CT3 entail that the number of divine Persons is the same as the number of divine Beings?” No. This apparent paradox will be cleared up in a moment.

(20) I call these phrases “singular terms” because they have the syntax of singular terms: they are noun-phrases that require a singular verb. But I do not mean to imply that they have the *semantic*features that orthodox philosophical semantics ascribes to what it calls “singular terms” (and which orthodox semantics, for all I know, takes to be part of the meaning of “singular term”). In particular, I do not mean to imply that there is a relation – call it “reference” or what you will – such that if, e.g., “God” bears this relation to *x* and to *y*, then *x* is absolutely identical with *y*. I do not know of a phrase that has the syntactical but not the semantical implications of “singular term”.

(21) And what of the phrase “the Holy Trinity” itself? I take these words to be short for “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, much as “the Holy Family” is short for “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph”. One might say, “In this painting, the Holy Trinity *is* represented as present in the Eucharist.” But then one might say, “In this painting, the Holy Family *is* shown entering Jerusalem.”

(22) I allude, of course, to the *filioque* controversy. As I understand the present state of this controversy, the concern of the Eastern Church is to say nothing that could be taken as a denial of the doctrine that the Father alone is the *fons et origo* of Deity, while the concern of the Western Church (i.e., Rome) is to do justice to Jesus’ statements about his relation to the Paraclete, especially John 16:14–15. It is my understanding that many theologians, both Roman Catholic and Orthodox, believe that the formula “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son” does justice to both of these concerns. But I speak under correction.

(23) It is perhaps tendentious to call CT7 and CT8 “conceptual truths,” since they together entail that if there are any divine Persons, there are at least three (a thesis shared by Catholic Christians and atheists, but rejected by Arians, Jews, Muslims, and, probably, most agnostics). What I mean by calling CT5–13 “conceptual truths” is this. Trinitarians *allege* that certain relations hold within the Godhead – that is, among the various divine Persons. CT5–13 display certain properties that Trinitarians *say* are essential to these relations. Arians, Jews, and Muslims can agree that CT5–13 display properties that are essential to the Trinitarian concepts of “procession” and “begetting” (just as they can agree that*being square is* an essential component of the concept of a round square), and go on to comment that these concepts are like the concept of a round square in that nothing could possibly fall under them.

(24) Since “*x* begets *y* ↔ *∃z (z* proceeds from *x* through *y)*” is a logical

consequence of CT10 and CT11, it is formally possible to define “begets” in terms of “proceeds”. But I doubt whether such a definition would be seen as a fruitful “move” by Christologists or by Trinitarian theologians whose concerns are wider than the logical issues addressed in the present paper.

(25) CT12 and 13 are redundant; they can be deduced from CT8–11.

(26) That is, God is an “individual substance of a rational nature”; (5) is not meant to imply that God is a*prosopon* or an *hypostasis*.

(27) The formal translations of the following English sentences are also deducible from (1) through (3) and CT1–13: “The Father is the same being as the Son”; “The Father is the same being as the Holy Spirit”; “The Son is the same being as the Holy Spirit”; “God is the same person as the Holy Spirit”; “God is the same being as the Son”; “God is the same being as the Holy Spirit”; “The Father is not the same person as the Holy Spirit”; “The Son is not the same person as the Holy Spirit”.

(28) The “wide-scope” version of (8) would be accepted by Catholic Christians, Arians, Jews, Muslims, and atheists. The “narrow-scope” version would be accepted by Catholic Christians alone.

(29) S is logically somewhat redundant. Given (1), CT1, CT2, CT4, and CT6–11, one can prove (2), (3), CT3, CT5, CT12, and CT13.

(30) This sentence will “come out true” in the sense that its symbolic translation is deducible from S and the proposition that some divine Person is unincarnate: “$\exists x\,(Dx\ \&\ \sim\exists y\ (y \text{ is a human being } \&\underline{P}xy))$”.

(31) I.e., “$\exists x(Gx\ \&\ Sx)$” and “$\sim\exists x(Fx\ \&\ Sx)$” are deducible from **S**.

(32) “Normal” should not be confused with “ordinary”.

(33) As the Father is, so also are the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(34) I say “primarily” because the sharing of the predicate “is Lord” equally by the Persons is asserted in the section of the Creed that is introduced by these words; and this predicate expresses a relational attribute of God.

(35) A part of this paper was read at the December, 1985 meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers. The commentator was Eleonore Stump. An overlapping part was read at the University of Notre Dame, at the conference on

which this book is based. The commentator was Keith Yandell. The two commentators have had considerable influence on the final form of this paper. Michael Detlefsen made extremely valuable comments on section 3. He is, of course, not responsible for the confusions that remain – all the more so because I have imprudently resisted some of his criticisms.

# Relative Identity and the Doctrine of the Trinity

**Michael C. Rea**

The doctrine of the Trinity maintains that there are exactly three divine Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) but only one God. The philosophical problem raised by this doctrine is well known. On the one hand, the doctrine seems clearly to imply that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are numerically distinct. How else could they be *three* Persons rather than one? On the other hand, it seems to imply that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are identical. If each Person is divine, how else could there be exactly *one*God? But Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be both distinct and identical. Thus, the doctrine appears to be incoherent.

In the contemporary literature, there are two main strategies for solving the problem: the Relative Identity (RI) strategy, and the Social Trinitarian (ST) strategy.[1] **(p.250)** Both of these strategies solve the problem by affirming the divinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while denying their absolute identity either with God or with one another. According to the RI strategy (which will be explained more fully below), the divine Persons stand in various relativized relations of sameness and distinctness. They are, for example, the same God as one another, but they are not the same Person. They are, we might say, God-identical but Person-distinct. Peter Geach has argued for reasons independent of the problem of the Trinity that there is no such thing as absolute identity, that *all* well-formed identity statements are at least implicitly relativized, and that there is no in-principle obstacle to there being *x*, *y*, F, and G such that *x* is the same F as *y* but not the same G.[2] Not surprisingly, then, some philosophers who have embraced the RI strategy have endorsed Geach's theory of relative identity along with it. But, as we shall see, Geach's theory is just one among several, and it is even possible to pursue the RI strategy without endorsing a theory of relative identity at all. The ST strategy, on the other hand, maintains that the relation between God and the Persons is not any sort of identity or sameness relation at all. Rather, it is something like parthood (God is a composite being whose parts are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) or membership (God is a community whose members are the divine Persons). The main challenge for both strategies is to find some way of respecting the Christian commitment to *monotheism* without incurring other problems in the process.

The ST strategy has been roundly criticized in the literature, and many of the criticisms I wholeheartedly endorse.[3] The RI strategy, on the other hand, has

been left largely untouched. Opponents of the strategy typically either dismiss it outright as unintelligible or else criticize it for reasons that simply do not apply to all theories of relative identity. Of course, if the RI strategy is unintelligible, or if the theories of relative identity that escape the usual criticisms are untenable, then these are serious objections that must be reckoned with. But, so far as I can tell, neither of these latter two claims has been adequately supported in the **(p.251)** literature. Thus, it is not surprising that RI Trinitarians seem largely unmoved by the objections that have so far been raised against their position.

In the present paper, I hope to offer a more persuasive line of criticism. In particular, I will argue for the following two conclusions:

> (i) It is possible to pursue the RI strategy without endorsing a Geach-style theory of relative identity. But doing so without telling an appropriate supplemental story about the metaphysics underlying RI relations leaves one with an incomplete solution to the problem of the Trinity and also leaves one vulnerable to the charge of polytheism.
> (ii) Pursuing the RI strategy under the assumption that a Geach-style theory of relative identity is correct commits one to the view that the very existence of the divine Persons is a theory-dependent matter.

The consequences mentioned in (i) and (ii) are not acceptable. Thus, the RI strategy is unsuccessful as a stand-alone solution to the problem of the Trinity.[4]

I will begin in the first section by describing the doctrine of relative identity in some detail. In the second section, I will identify and describe two versions of the RI strategy—what I will call the *pure* RI strategy and the *impure* RI strategy. I will also discuss briefly what I take to be the standard criticisms of the RI strategy. My own objections to that strategy will then be presented in the third section.

## Relative Identity

Classically understood, identity is an absolute relation that obeys Leibniz's Law.[5] To say that identity is an absolute relation is to say (at least) that unqualified sentences of the form "$x = y$" are well-formed and meaningful and that they are not to be analyzed in terms of sentences of the form "$x$ is the same F as $y$." To say that it obeys Leibniz's Law is to say that it is governed by the following principle:

> (LL) For all $x$ and $y$, $x$ is identical to $y$ only if, for all predicates $\varphi$, $x$ satisfies

φ if and only if *y*satisfies φ; or, in symbols: $\forall x \forall y[x = y \supset (\forall \varphi)(\varphi(x) \equiv \varphi(y))]$

As is well known, some philosophers reject the classical understanding of identity. Among those who do, some hold that identity is *relative.* Various different views have been advertised in the literature under the label "relative identity." **(p.252)** Peter Geach, the earliest and most well known contemporary advocate of a theory of relative identity, endorses both of the following theses:[6]

(R1) Statements of the form "*x* = *y*" are incomplete and therefore ill-formed. A proper identity statement has the form "*x* is the same F as *y*."

(R2) States of affairs of the following sort are possible: *x* is an F, *y* is an F, *x* is a G, *y* is a G, *x* is the same F as *y*, but *x* is not the same G as *y*.

Together, R1 and R2 imply, among other things, the following:

(C1) Classical identity does not exist.

(C2) LL is ill-formed.

(C3) In general, *x*'s being the same F as *y* does not guarantee that *x* is indiscernible from *y*.

(C4) "*x* is the same F as *y*" is not analyzable as "*x* is an F, *y* is an F, and *x* = *y*."

Let us refer to the conjunction of R1 and R2, together with the consequences C1– C4, as *Geach's theory of relative identity*.

Not everyone who claims to embrace relative identity endorses Geach's theory, however. For example, Eddy Zemach accepts R1 but proposes a replacement for R2, and Leslie Stevenson rejects both R1 and R2, but declares himself a relative identity theorist on the grounds that, on his view, "*x* = *y*" just means that, for some count noun F, *x* is the same F as *y*.[7] And so not everyone who claims to be a relative identity theorist is committed to C1–C4. I will shortly offer reasons for doubting that some of the views just mentioned actually deserve to be called theories of relative identity. But for now the point is just that, in the literature on relative identity, there are alternatives to Geach's theory that are advertised by their proponents as theories of relative identity. And some of these alternatives do deserve the label.

Among the alternatives to Geach's theory, probably the most important is the one

defended by Nicholas Griffin.[8] Griffin rejects R1, but accepts R2 along with two further theses. The first is a thesis about the relationship between relative and absolute identity statements:

> (R3) Sortal relative identity statements are more fundamental than absolute identity statements.

One implication of R3 is that absolute identity statements are to be analyzed or defined in terms of more primitive sortal-relative identity statements, rather than the other way around.

**(p.253)** The second thesis is Griffin's proposed substitutivity principle for relative identity predicates:

> (RLL) $x$ is the same F as $y \equiv (\forall \varphi \in \Delta_F)(Fx \,\&\, Fy \,\&\, \varphi x \equiv \varphi y)$

Intuitively, RLL just says that, for each general noun F, being the same F implies indiscernibility with respect to the members of some class of predicates, $\Delta_F$. Note that RLL leaves open the possibility that there are predicates *not* in $\Delta_F$.

Griffin introduces RLL because, as he notes, a theory of relative identity ought to license inferences like (I) and (II) below without licensing inferences like (III):

> (I) *x* is the same color as *y; x* is red. Therefore, *y* is red.
> (II) *x* is the same car as *y; x* is twelve feet long. Therefore, *y* is twelve feet long.
> (III) *x* is the same color as *y; x* is a car. Therefore, *y* is a car.

RLL is supposed to provide a way of getting what we want without contradicting R2; and, Griffin argues, adding it to a classical second-order logic generates a consistent and complete theory of relative identity. Moreover, the logic that results will be one within which classical identity is consistently definable.[9]

R3, on the other hand, is supposed to follow from Griffin's view that individuation without sortals is impossible. He writes:

> It is hard to see how any sense can be made of the notion of an individual item without individuation, and it is hard to see how sense can be made of individuation without sortals which supply the principles which make individuation possible. In view of this, it seems to me that, while all types

> of identity statements are admissible, sortal-relative identity statements have the most fundamental role to play, for without them we cannot make sense of the notion of an individual item. Once we have individuated some items by means of a sortal and found, say, that the item named by “a” and that named by “b” are the same F, we can go on to ask if they share all their properties and are thus the same absolutely.[10]

It is, of course, tempting to ask here what our individuation practices could possible have to do with the *identity* of the things that we individuate. Why should the fact that we individuate things by way of sortal concepts go any distance toward showing that nothing is distinct from anything else absolutely and independently of our sortal concepts? The answer should be obvious: It does not go any distance toward showing this *unless* we presuppose a decidedly antirealist metaphysic. And this is precisely the sort of metaphysic that Griffin thinks underlies relative identity theory.

Michael Dummett brings this point out nicely. In discussing Geach's theory of relative identity, Dummett raises the question of how quantifiers are to be interpreted. His worry is as follows:

> **(p.254)** …there is a compelling feeling of incompatibility between the picture that we are accustomed to form of the classical interpretation of the quantifiers and the picture evoked by Geach's doctrine on identity.…[On the classical treatment of quantifiers], the *picture* we have of what constitutes a domain of objects which can serve as the range of the individual variables is such that it is impossible to see how there could be any objection to supposing an absolute relation of identity to be defined on it: the elements of the domain are thought of as being, in Quine's words, the same or different absolutely.…[But] it seems that Geach means us to picture that over which the variables range as an amorphous lump of reality, in itself not articulated into distinct objects. Such an articulation may be accomplished in any one of many different ways: we slice up reality into distinct individual objects by selecting a particular criterion of identity.[11]

The apparent tension between Geach's theory of identity and the classical treatment of quantifiers arises because of Geach's commitment to R1. But Griffin also stands against the classical treatment of quantifiers on the grounds that “it gets the semantics upside down.”[12] On the classical treatment, the individuation of objects in the domain is independent of our sorting procedures. But Griffin wants it the other way around. Thus, he endorses Dummett's characterization of

the metaphysic underlying Geach's theory of relative identity as an accurate description of the metaphysic underlying his own.

As I have already indicated views other than Griffin's and Geach's sometimes go under the label “relative identity.” As I see it, however, no view deserves that label unless it is committed to either R1 or R3. Views according to which classical identity exists and is no less fundamental than other sameness relations are simply not views according to which *identity* is relative. Perhaps there are multiple sameness relations, and perhaps some of those relations are both sortal relative and such that R2 is true of them. But so long as classical identity exists and is not to be analyzed in terms of more primitive relative identity relations—there seems to be no reason whatsoever to think of other “sameness” relations as identity relations.[13] Thus, on views that reject both R1 and R3, there seems to be no reason for thinking that identity is nonabsolute.

## The RI Strategy

The RI strategy for solving the problem of the Trinity comes in two varieties. The *pure* strategy endorses each of the following two claims:

> ($RI_A$) Some doctrine of relative identity (that is, some doctrine that includes either R1 or R3) is true.
>
> **(p.255)** ($RI_B$) The words “is God” and “is distinct from” in Trinitarian formulations express relativized identity and distinctness relations rather than absolute identity and distinctness.

The *impure* strategy endorses $RI_B$ without endorsing $RI_A$.

The “Trinitarian formulations” mentioned in $RI_B$ include statements like these:

> (T1) Each Person of the Trinity is distinct from each of the others.
>
> (T2) Each Person of the Trinity is God.

According to both versions of the RI strategy, the relations expressed by “is God” and “is distinct from” in statements like T1 and T2 are relations like *being the same God as* and *being a distinct Person from*, respectively. As *relativized* identity relations, they are not to be analyzed in terms of classical identity, and they do not guarantee the indiscernibility of their relata—and this regardless of whether classical identity happens to exist. In other words, predicates like “is the

same God as" and "is the same Person as" are predicates of which R2 is true, and they are governed by RLL rather than by LL.

According to RI Trinitarians, T1 and T2 are to be understood as equivalent to T1a and T2a, respectively:

> (T1a) No Person of the Trinity is the same Person as any of the others. (That is, the Father is not the same Person as the Son, the Father is not the same Person as the Spirit, and the Son is not the same Person as the Spirit.)
>
> (T2a) Each Person of the Trinity is the same God as each of the others.

Since "same God as" and "same Person as" do not pick out relations that obey LL, no contradiction can be derived from their conjunction with T3:

> (T3) There is exactly one God.

Thus, the RI strategy apparently manages to respect the "oneness" of God without giving up the "threeness" of the Persons.

As indicated earlier, there has been relatively little by way of explicit criticism of this strategy in the literature on the Trinity; and, of the few critical remarks that *have* been offered, none seem especially persuasive. Broadly speaking, the two standard objections are these: (i) that the view requires its proponents to reject the principle of the Indiscernibility of Identicals;[14] and (ii) that, on the assumption that statements of the form "A is the same F as B" are not just equivalent to statements of the form "A and B are both Fs, and A = B," RI predicates are unintelligible.[15] As the **(p.256)** previous section makes clear, objection (i) is simply false. Objection (ii) seemsto me to be on target, but, by itself and without further development, it is unlikely to move those who think that they can understand the RI solution (which, of course, will be *every single proponent of that solution*, and perhaps some fence-sitters as well). More needs to be said if the RI strategy is to be effectively undermined. It is to that task that I now turn.

## Objections

I will start by explaining why I think that what I have called the *impure* RI strategy ought to be rejected. Recall that this strategy involves embracing $RI_B$ *without* embracing $RI_A$—that is, without embracing a doctrine of relative identity. This is the sort of strategy that is pursued by the most well-known

proponent of the RI solution to the problem of the Trinity, Peter van Inwagen.[16] His view, therefore, will be my focus in the first part of the discussion that follows.

Van Inwagen remains explicitly neutral on the question whether absolute identity exists, and he also refrains from committing himself to anything like R1 or R3. Instead, he simply starts with two undefined RI predicates—"is the same person as" and "is the same being as"—and assumes, in effect, that R2 is true of both.[17] From there, he proceeds to construct translations of T1–T3 in a language devoid of singular referring terms and involving no RI predicates other than those defined in terms of the two primitives and various one-place predicates like "is divine," "begets," "is begotten," and "proceeds."[18] In brief, the task of **(p.257)** translation is carried out as follows: Let B stand for the*same being as* relation. Let G*x* abbreviate "*x* is divine and ∀*y*(*y* is divine ⊃ *x*B*y*)." G*x*, then, is the RI equivalent of "*x* is God." Let F, S, and H stand for predicates ("begets," "is begotten," and "proceeds") that have the following properties: (a) they are satisfied, if at all, by a divine Person, (b) if *x* and *y* satisfy one of them, then *x* is the same person as *y,* and (c) if *x* satisfies one and *y* satisfies another, then *x* is not the same person as *y.* We can then stipulate that F*x*, S*x*, and H*x* are, respectively, the RI equivalents of "*x* is the Father," "*x* is the Son," and "*x* is the Holy Spirit."[19] Finally, let P stand for the *same person* as relation. Given all this, a sentence like "The Father is God" may be translated simply as "∃*x*(F*x* & G*x*)." Thus, theses T1 and T2 maybe translated as follows:

(RT1) $\exists x \exists y \exists z(Fx \,\&\, Sy \,\&\, Hz \,\&\, \neg xPy \,\&\, \neg xPz \,\&\, \neg yPz)$

(RT2) $\exists x \exists y \exists z(Fx \,\&\, Gx \,\&\, Sy \,\&\, Gy \,\&\, Hz \,\&\, Gz)$

On the assumption that counting *Gods* is a matter of counting *divine beings* rather than counting (say)*divine persons*, G*x* will also be the RI equivalent of "*x* is *the one and only* God." Thus, we have the following translation for T3:

(RT3) $\exists x Gx$

RT3 is entailed by RT2; and since the only "identity" predicates involved in RT1-RT3 are predicates that do not obey Leibniz's Law, there is no way to derive a contradiction from the conjunction of RT1 and RT2. Admittedly, given our stipulations, we *can* derive the following claim: ∃*x*∃*y*(*x*B*y* & *x*P*x* & ¬*x*P*y*).[20] Given those same stipulations, however, that claim is not contradictory.

**(p.258)** But what has been accomplished? Let us grant that the above translations are plausible. Has van Inwagen shown that the doctrine of the Trinity is coherent? Surprisingly, the answer is no. To be sure, he has shown that, on one way of understanding them, no contradiction can be derived from T1-T3 alone (or from suitably similar conjunctions of Trinitarian claims). But by remaining neutral on the question whether absolute identity exists, he leaves open the possibility that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are absolutely distinct, and if they are absolutely distinct, it is hard to see what it could possibly mean to say that they are the *same being*, as RT2 implies. Thus, in order for his argument to be convincing, it appears that van Inwagen must *rule out the* possibility that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are absolutely distinct. But he cannot do this while remaining neutral on the question whether absolute identity exists.

Let me put this point another way. If absolute identity exists, the following is a rather compelling principle:

$$(\forall x \forall y)(x \neq y \supset \neg x \mathrm{B} y)$$

"Being" is plausibly the most general sortal, on a par with sortals like "entity", "thing," and "object." Thus, "*x* is (absolutely) distinct from *y*" seems to be synonymous with "*x* is not the same being (thing, entity, object) as *y*." If this is right, then P is analytic. But the conjunction of P with RT1 and RT2 is incoherent.[21] Thus, van Inwagen's arguments show that the doctrine of the Trinity is coherent *only* on the assumption that P is not true.[22] A Trinitarian who accepts P will not escape the charge of incoherence by accepting RT1 and RT2 as translations of T1 and T2. Thus, *given* that P is highly intuitive, in order to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is coherent van Inwagen must give us some reason for thinking that P is not true. One who accepts R1 can easily provide such a reason: P is not true, she will say, because it is ill-formed. It is ill-formed because it includes the formula "$x \neq y$." But van Inwagen does not want to commit to R1, and he has offered us no other reason for believing that P is false.

There are at least two morals to draw from this conclusion. One is that pursuing the impure R1 strategy offers at best an incomplete solution to the problem of the Trinity. At the very least, a story will have to be told that explains how R2 could be true of the sameness relations invoked in Trinitarian formulations. **(p.259)** Moreover, the story will have to be nonheretical. (Thus, for example, telling a story according to which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be the same God but different Persons in just the same way that two cars can be the same

color but different cars clearly will not do the job.)

The other moral is that even embracing a Griffin-like theory of relative identity —that is, a theory that does not rule out classical identity—will leave one vulnerable to polytheism, or worse. Monotheism requires that there be exactly one being who is God. But, as we have just seen, if classical identity makes its way into one's logic, T1 and T2 together seem to imply that there are three distinct beings who “are” God. And now the familiar problem is back: incoherence looms, unless we can tell a story (other than the “absolute identity” story) about what it is to “be” God that is both orthodox and plausible. Elsewhere, Jeffrey Brower and I offer such a story, and we do so without embracing any doctrine of relative identity.[23] But my point here is just that some such story is needed and has not so far been offered by anyone who wishes to pursue the impure RI strategy.

I conclude, then, that absent some supplementary story explaining the metaphysics of RI relations, the impure RI strategy is unacceptable. But what about the pure RI strategy? As I see it, the consequences of that strategy are catastrophic. The reason is that, as noted above, the doctrine of relative identity seems to presuppose an antirealist metaphysic. I have already quoted Dummett's reasons for thinking that relative identity goes hand in hand with antirealism. But we can bring the presupposition to light in another way by taking a brief look at Geach's main argument for the relativity of identity.[24]

Geach thinks that semantic paradoxes (for example, Richard's and Grelling's) prevent us from reading LL as saying that $x = y$ if and only if whatever is true of $x$ is true of y.[25] Thus, he says, we must read it instead as saying (roughly) that $x = y$ if and only if $x$ and $y$ are *indiscernible with respect to all of the predicates that form the descriptive resources of our theory*. But if this is right, then identity is best construed as theory-relative. The reason is that whereas one theory might have the descriptive resources to distinguish $x$ from $y$, another theory might not. By the lights of the first theory, then, $x = y$is false, whereas, by the lights of the second **(p.260)** theory, $x = y$ is true. But that is incoherent if $x = y$is understood as expressing *absolute* identity. Better, then, to treat it as expressing sortal-relative identity. Treating it that way, we can say that $x$ and $y$ are the same F but not the same G (where, presumably, G is a predicate in our first theory but not our second), and the incoherence dissolves.

To see the point more clearly, consider the following example. Imagine two

theories: one, $T_1$, which includes the sortal "lump of clay" but no artifact sortals (like "statue" or "bowl"), and another, $T_2$, which includes the sortals "lump of clay," "statue," and "bowl," and, furthermore, treats statues and bowls that have been made from the same lump of clay as distinct items. Now suppose a $T_1$-theorist and a $T_2$-theorist watch a sculptor take a lump of clay and make first (what the $T_2$-theorist would call) a statue, then a bowl. By the lights of the $T_1$-theorist, the sculptor does not manage to generate or destroy anything. What the $T_2$-theorist would call "the statue" and "the bowl" are identical. By the lights of the $T_2$-theorist, however, statue and bowl are distinct. But, obviously, both cannot be right. Thus, we have a problem. One way out is to say that identity is theory-relative: the bowl and statue are the same lump of clay; they are not the same bowl or statue; and there is simply no fact about whether they are absolutely identical or distinct. But if we do say this (taking very seriously the claim that there is *no* theory-independent fact about *what* there is or about how many things there are in the various regions occupied by what the $T_1$-theorist calls "the lump of clay"), then we commit ourselves to the view that the very existence of things like statues, bowls, and lumps of clay depends upon the theories that recognize them. This is antirealism.

Many philosophers are attracted to antirealism, but accepting it as part of a solution to the problem of the Trinity is disastrous. For clearly orthodoxy will not permit us to say that the very existence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a *theory-dependent* matter. Nor will it permit us to say that the distinctness of the divine Persons is somehow relative to our ways of thinking or theorizing. The latter appears to be a form of modalism.[26] And yet it is hard to see how it could be otherwise if Geach's theory of relative identity is true. For what else could it possibly mean to say that there is simply no fact about whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same thing as one another, the same thing as God, or, indeed, the same thing as Baal?

Perhaps there is a way for proponents of R1 to dodge commitment to anti-realism. For perhaps there is some alternative metaphysic that might sensibly be thought to underlie a Geach-style theory of relative identity. (Though the quotations from Dummett and Griffin, and the argument on behalf of R1 supplied by Geach, *suggest* that R1 commits its adherents to antirealism, they do not, after all, prove that conclusion.) But it is hard to see what that metaphysic might be. Thus, **(p.261)** for the relative identity theorist who wants to avoid commitment to antirealism, the charge of incoherence becomes an objection

seriously to be reckoned with. What motivates commitment to R1, if not reasoning of the sort described above (reasoning, again, that leads straight to antirealism)? What can the would-be realist RI theorist say in response to Dummett's worries about quantification in the context of an RI logic? I said earlier that the charge of unintelligibility is unpersuasive mainly because proponents of relative identity have taken pains to try to make their view intelligible, and the accounts they have offered along these lines have not themselves been shown to be unintelligible. But if one rejects what proponents of relative identity have to say about the motivation and metaphysics underlying their view, the charge of unintelligibility returns with a vengeance, and I cannot see how that charge can be rebutted without embracing antirealism.

Moreover, even if we concede that R1 can be squared with a realist metaphysic, the fact remains that it is extremely implausible, and what few arguments have been marshaled on its behalf have been strongly (and rightly, in my opinion) criticized in the literature.[27] Thus, even apart from its antirealist consequences, I think that there are ample grounds for rejecting R1.

## Conclusion

I have argued, in effect, that RI theorists face a dilemma. If they pursue the impure RI strategy, or even if they pursue a pure strategy that falls short of endorsing R1, they leave open the possibility that absolute identity exists. In leaving open that possibility, and without telling an appropriate supplemental story about the metaphysics underling RI relations, they find themselves with an incomplete solution to the problem of the Trinity and they leave themselves vulnerable to polytheism. If they pursue the pure RI strategy, then they are committed to thinking that the existence and distinctness of the divine Persons is somehow a theory-dependent matter—a view that implies modalism, or worse. I have acknowledged that this latter commitment can be avoided by giving up standard views about the motivation and metaphysics underlying relative identity theory. But in giving up those standard views, the relative identity theorist incurs **(p.262)** the burden of supplying alternative motivation and an alternative explanation of the metaphysic underlying her theory of identity. So far, this has not been done; and it seems to me that it cannot be done apart from a commitment to anti-realism. In light of these considerations, I conclude that the RI solution to the problem of the Trinity, taken as a stand-alone solution to that problem, is unsuccessful.[28]

Notes:

(1) Proponents of the STstrategy include Timothy Bartel, “Could There Be More Than One Almighty?”*Religious Studies* 29 (1993): 465–95, and “Could There Be More Than One Lord?” *Faith and Philosophy*11 (1994): 357–78; David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), and “Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. R. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 48–78; Stephen Davis, “A Somewhat Playful Proof of the Social Trinity in Five Easy Steps,” *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 2 (1999): 103–5; Peter Forrest, “Divine Fission: A New Way of Moderating Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies* 34 (1998): 281–97; C. Stephen Layman, “Tritheism and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 291–8; Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity,”*Thomist* 50(1986): 325–52, “The Threeness/ Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 37–53, and “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, 21–47; Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and C. J. F. Williams, “Neither Confounding the Persons nor Dividing the Substance,” in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honor of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Alan Padgett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 227–43. The position is also commonly attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers. See especially Brown, *Divine Trinity; Plantinga* “Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogyof the Trinity,” and H. A. Wolfson, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*, vol. 1, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

Proponents of the RI strategy include James Cain, “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Logic of Relative Identity,” *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 141–52; G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers*(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), at 118–20; A. P. Martinich, “Identity and Trinity,” *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978): 169–81, and “God, Emperor, and Relative Identity,” *Franciscan Studies* 39 (1979): 180–91; and Peter van Inwagen, “And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God,” in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas Morris (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 241–78 [this volume, ch. 12].

(2) See Peter Geach, “Identity,” *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967): 3–12, reprinted in his *Logic Matters*(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), 238–46; “Identity—A Reply,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969): 556–9, reprinted in *Logic Matters*, 247–9; “Ontological Relativity and Relative Identity,” in *Logic and Ontology*, ed. Milton K. Munitz (New York: New York

University Press, 1973), 287–302; and *Reference and Generality*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), sections 30, 34, and 110.

(3) See, e.g., Timothy Bartel, “The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian,” *Religious Studies* 24 (1988): 129–55; Jeffrey Brower, “The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: A Reply to Wierenga,” Faith and Philosophy (forthcoming); Kelly James Clark, “Trinity or Tritheism?” *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 463–76; Edward Feser, “Swinburne's Tritheism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 42 (1997): 175–84; Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis; Daniel Kendall, SJ; Gerald O’Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–49 [this volume, ch. 4]; and Trenton Merricks, “Split Brains and the Godhead,” in *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Thomas Crisp et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, forthcoming). Some of what I would be inclined to add to these criticisms is expressed in Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* (forthcoming) [this volume, ch. 14] and in my unpublished “Polytheism and Christian Belief.”

(4) The solution that I favor is plausibly seen as a conjunction of what I will later call the “impure” RI strategy with a supplemental story about the metaphysics of RI relations. Jeffrey Brower and I defend this solution in our “Material Constitution and the Trinity.”

(5) Note that I am here using the label “Leibniz's Law” to refer simply to the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals. The converse principle—the principle of the identity of indiscernibles—is more controversial and plays no substantive role in the discussion that follows.

(6) See references in note 2 above.

(7) Eddy Zemach, “In Defense of Relative Identity,” *Philosophical Studies* 26 (1974): 207–18; Leslie Stevenson, “Relative Identity and Leibniz's Law,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1972): 155–8. I take it that saying that “$x = y$” means that $x$ is the same F as $y$ (for some count noun F), is not quite the same as saying that “$x = y$” is incomplete or ill-formed. Likewise, I think that R1 is not implied by the claim that$x = y$ if and only if there is some sortal F such that $x$ is the same F as $y$.

(8) *Relative Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). See also Richard Routley and Nicholas Griffin, “Towards a Logic of Relative Identity,” *Logique et Analyse*

22 (1979): 65–83.

(9) One way is to define it as follows (where "$x$ —$_{\mathrm{F}}$ $y$" abbreviates "$x$ is the same F as $y$"):

$$(=)x = y \equiv (\forall \mathrm{F})[(\mathrm{F}x \,\&\, \mathrm{F}y) \supset x =_{\mathrm{F}} y]$$

Another way is simply to define it by way of LL.

(10) Griffin, *Relative Identity*, 159.

(11) Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Harper and Row, 1973), 562–3.

(12) Griffin, *Relative Identity*, 158.

(13) Aristotle's "accidental sameness," for example, appears to be a relation that fits this description. That is, it is plausibly taken as a "sameness" relation; it is sortal relative and obeys R2; but it is not an identity relation, and belief in accidental sameness does not preclude belief in absolute identity. For further discussion of accidental sameness, see my "Sameness Without Identity: An Aristotelian Solution to the Problem of Material Constitution," *Ratio* 11 (1998): 316–28, reprinted in *Form and Matter: Contemporary Themes in Metaphysics*, ed. David S. Oderberg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999), 103–16; and Brower and Rea, "Material Constitution and the Trinity."

(14) See Bartel, "The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian."

(15) See Richard Cartwright, "On the Logical Problem of the Trinity," in his *Philosophical Essays*(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 187–200; and Merricks, "Split Brains and the Godhead."

(16) See his "And Yet They Are Not Three Gods."

(17) Note that van Inwagen's "same person as" relation is different from the relation that would be expressed by the words "same Person as." I have been treating "Person" as a *sui generis* sortal term that applies only to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But van Inwagen's terminology makes no distinction as regards personhood between the divine Persons and human persons.

(18) The Father begets; the Son is begotten; the Spirit proceeds; and all three are divine. Singular referring expressions are banned for the sake of neutrality with

respect to the existence of classical identity. According to van Inwagen:

> The philosopher who eschews classical, absolute identity must also eschew singular terms, for the idea of a singular term is—at least in currently orthodox semantical theory—inseparably bound to the classical semantical notion of reference or denotation; and this notion, in its turn, is inseparably bound to the idea of classical identity. It is a part of the orthodox semantical concept of reference that reference is a many-one relation. And it is a part of the idea of a many-one relation…that if x bears such a relation to y and bears it to z, then y and z are absolutely identical. (That's what it says on the label.) ("And Yet They Are Not Three Gods," 259 [this vol., p. 235])

> Note, however, that there is reason to doubt that singular referring expressions must be banned. If the quoted line of reasoning is correct, RI theorists should have trouble with counting generally. But, assuming they do not have general problems counting, why could not a relative identity theorist just say, e.g., that reference is a relation between many words and one man, or between many words and one horse, or between many words and one…etc.? If the worry is that relativists cannot make sense of the notion that there is *one* horse standing in the "is referred to by" relation to various words, then how can we expect them to count at all? And, importantly, how can we expect them to offer an adequate translation of T3–the thesis that there is *exactly one* God? On the other hand, if identifying one horse as the referent of various names is not the problem, it is hard to see what would be the problem with singular reference. Notably, neither Geach nor Griffin seems especially concerned about the issue.

(19) Cf. van Inwagen, "And Yet They Are Not Three Gods," 265–7 [thi vol., p. 000].

(20) Here is the derivation: From RT2 and the definition of *Gx* we get RT4:

> *(RT4)*$\exists x \exists y \exists z$(F*x* & *x* is divine & $\forall m$(*m* is divine $\supset$ *x*Bm) & S*y* & *y* is divine & $\forall m$(*m* is divine $\supset$*y*Bm) & H*z* & *z* is divine & $\forall m$(*m* is divine $\supset$ *zBm*)).

RT4 implies RT5:

(RT5) $\exists x \exists y \exists z$(F*x* & S*y* & H*z* & *x*B*y* & *x*B*z* & *y*B*z*).

Given our stipulations about F, S, and H, RT5 implies RT6:

(RT6) $\exists x \exists y \exists z(Fx \,\&\, Sy \,\&\, Hz \,\&\, x\mathrm{B}y \,\&\, x\mathrm{B}z \,\&\, y\mathrm{B}z \,\&\, \neg x\mathrm{P}y \,\&\, \neg x\mathrm{P}z \,\&\, \neg y\mathrm{P}z)$.

And, given those same stipulations, RT6 implies RT7:

(RT7) $\exists x \exists y \exists z(x\mathrm{P}x \,\&\, y\mathrm{P}y \,\&\, z\mathrm{P}z \,\&\, x\mathrm{B}y \,\&\, x\mathrm{B}z \,\&\, y\mathrm{B}z \,\&\, \neg x\mathrm{P}y \,\&\, \neg x\mathrm{P}z \,\&\, \neg y\mathrm{P}z)$.

Simplification of RT7, in turn, yields the desired conclusion, RT8:

(RT8) $\exists x \exists y(x\mathrm{B}y \,\&\, x\mathrm{P}x \,\&\, \neg x\mathrm{P}y)$.

(21) Here is the proof. As stated above, from RT1 & RT2 we can derive RT8:

(RT8) $\exists x \exists y(x\mathrm{B}y \,\&\, x\mathrm{P}x \,\&\, \emptyset x\mathrm{P}y)$.

But, allowing that there is such4 a thing as absolute distinctness, the conjunction of $x\mathrm{P}x \,\&\, \emptyset x\mathrm{P}y$ implies$x \neq y$ Thus, RT8 implies RT9:

(RT9) $\exists x \exists y(x\mathrm{B}y \,\&\, x \neq y)$.

But RT9, together with P, implies the contradictory RT10:

(RT10) $\exists x \exists y(x\mathrm{B}y \,\&\, \emptyset x\mathrm{B}y)$.

(22) Van Inwagen acknowledges this point (“And Yet They Are Not Three Gods,” 262, 265 [this vol., pp. 000, 000]), but he does not seem to see it as a source of any serious objection to his project.

(23) Brower and Rea, “Material Constitution and the Trinity.”

(24) What follows is a summary of the argument on behalf of RI that is presented in Geach, “Identity.” But see also his “Ontological Relativity.”

(25) To see why one might think this, consider Grelling's Paradox: Let the word “heterological” mean “is not true of itself.” Thus, “long” is heterological, since it is not a long word; “unspeakable” is heterological, since it can be spoken; etc. Now, by definition, “heterological” is heterological only if it is not true of itself; but if it is not true of itself, then it is *not* heterological. So “heterological” is heterological if and only if it is not heterological, which is contradictory. One way to solve this paradox (and others) is to hold that truth is relativized to a language, so that, e.g., we can speak in a language other than L of what istrue-in-L of a thing *x*, but we cannot speak *in L* of what is true *simpliciter* of *x*. (Cf. Alfred Tarski, “The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages,” in his *Logic*,

*Semantics, Metamathematics: Papers from 1923–1938*. 2nd ed., trans. J. H. Woodger [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983], 152–278 and “The Establishment of Scientific Semantics” in the same volume, 401–8.) But if we adopt this solution, or one relevantly similar to it, then we must reject constructions like “whatever is true of *x*.…”

(26) Modalism is the view that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not really distinct from one another. According to modalism, each Person is just God in a different guise, or playing a different role—much like Superman and Clark Kent are just the Kryptonian Kal-El in different guises, or playing different roles.

(27) See especially Fred Feldman, “Geach and Relative Identity,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969): 547–55, and “A Rejoinder,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969): 560–1; Michael Dummett, Frege, ch. 16;*The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), ch. 11; and“Does Quantification Involve Identity?” in *Peter Geach: Philosophical Encounters*, ed. Harry Lewis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991); Griffin, Relative Identity, ch. 8; Jack Nelson, “Relative Identity,” *Noûs* 4 (1970): 241–60; Douglas Odegard, “Identity Through Time,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (1972): 29–38; John Perry, “The Same F,” *Philosophical Review* 79 (1972): 181–200; and W. V. O. Quine, review of *Reference and Generality*, by Peter Geach, *Philosophical Review* 73 (1964): 100–4. For additional, general criticisms of the doctrine of relative identity, see also John Hawthorne, “Identity,” in *The Oxford Handbook for Metaphysics*, ed. Michael Loux and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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# Material Constitution and the Trinity

**Jeffrey E. Brower**

**Michael C. Rea**

As is well known, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity poses a serious philosophical problem. On the one hand, it affirms that there are three distinct Persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom is God. On the other hand, it says that there is one and only one God. The doctrine therefore pulls us in two directions at once—in the direction of saying that there is exactly one divine being and in the direction of saying that there is more than one.

There is another well-known philosophical problem that presents us with the same sort of tension: the problem of material constitution. This problem arises whenever it appears that an object *a* and an object *b* share all of the same parts and yet have different modal properties.[1] To take just one of the many well-worn examples in the literature: Consider a bronze statue of the Greek goddess, Athena, and the lump of bronze that constitutes it. On the one hand, it would appear that we must recognize at least*two* material objects in the region occupied by the statue. For presumably the statue cannot survive the process of being melted down and recast whereas the lump of bronze can. On the other hand, our ordinary counting practices lead us to recognize only *one* material object in the region. As Harold Noonan aptly puts it, counting two material objects in such a region seems to "manifest a bad case of double vision".[2] Here, then, as with the doctrine of the Trinity, we are pulled in two directions at once.

Admittedly, the analogy between the two problems is far from perfect. But we mention it because, as we shall argue below, it turns out that a relatively neglected response to the problem of material constitution can be developed into a novel solution to the problem of the Trinity. In our view, this new solution is more promising than the other solutions available in the contemporary literature. It is independently plausible, it is motivated by considerations independent of the problem of the Trinity, and it is immune to objections that azict the other solutions. The guiding intuition is the Aristotelian idea that it is possible for an **(p.264)** object *a* and an object *b* to be "one in number"—that is, numerically the same— without being strictly identical.

We will begin in section 1 by offering a precise statement of the problem of the Trinity. In section 2, we will flesh out the Aristotelian notion of "numerical sameness without identity", explain how it solves the problem of material constitution, and defend it against what we take to be the most obvious and important objections to it. Also in that section we will distinguish numerical sameness without identity from two superficially similar relations. Finally, in Sections 3 and 4, we will show how the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution can be developed into a solution to the problem of the Trinity, and we will highlight some of the more interesting consequences of the solution we describe.[3]

## 1. The Problem of the Trinity

The central claim of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God exists in three Persons —Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This claim is not problematic because of any superficial incoherence or inconsistency with well-entrenched intuitions. Rather, it is problematic because of a tension that results from constraints imposed on its interpretation by other aspects of orthodox Christian theology. These constraints are neatly summarized in the following passage from the so-called Athanasian Creed:

> We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person for the Father, another for the Son, and yet another for the Holy Spirit. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one…The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, and the Holy Spirit is eternal; and yet they are not three eternals, but there is one eternal. Likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, and the Holy Spirit is almighty; and yet there are not three almighties, but there is one almighty. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God.[4]

**(p.265)** The passage quoted here is widely—and rightly—taken to offer a paradigm statement of the orthodox understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, it tells us that the doctrine of the Trinity must be understood in such a way as to be compatible with each of the following theses:

(T1) Each Person of the Trinity is distinct from each of the others.

(T2) Each Person of the Trinity is God.

(T3) There is exactly one God.

Each of these theses is affirmed by the Creed in order to rule out a specific heresy. T1 is intended to rule out *modalism*, the view that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not really distinct from one another. According to modalism, each Person is just God in a different guise, or playing a different role—much like Superman and Clark Kent are just the Kryptonian Kal-El in different guises, or playing different roles. T2 is intended to rule out *subordinationism*, the view that not all of the Persons are divine, or that the divinity of one or more of the Persons is somehow unequal with, or subordinate to, that of the others. T3 is intended to rule out *polytheism*, the view that there is more than one God. The problem, however, is that the conjunction of T1–T3 is apparently incoherent. For on their most natural interpretation, they imply that three distinct beings are each identical with one being (since each of the Persons is God, and yet there is only one God).

In the contemporary literature, there are two main strategies for solving the problem: the Relative-Identity strategy, and the Social-Trinitarian strategy. Both of these strategies solve the problem at least in part by denying that the words "is God" in Trinitarian formulations mean "is absolutely identical with God". Thus both are well-poised to avoid the heresy of modalism.[5] Furthermore, both affirm T2 (or some suitable variant thereof); thus, subordinationism is not a worry either. The real question is whether either manages to avoid polytheism without incurring other problems in the process. In our view, the answer is *no*—at least not as these solutions have been developed in the literature so far. Social Trinitarianism we reject outright. The Relative-Identity solution we reject as a *stand-alone*solution to the problem of the Trinity. (That is, we think that it is successful only if it is supplemented by a story about the metaphysics of relative-identity relations. More on this at the end of section 2below). Since we have already explained elsewhere why we find these solutions unsatisfying, we will not repeat the details of our objections here.[6] Instead, we'll simply summarize by saying that we reject both the Social Trinitarian solution and existing versions of the Relative Identity **(p.266)** solution because they fail to provide an account of the Trinity that satisfies the following five desiderata:

(D1) It is clearly consistent with the view that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are divine individuals, and that there is exactly one divine individual.

(D2) It does not conflict with a natural reading of either the Bible or the ecumenical creeds.

(D3) It is consistent with the view that God is an individual rather than a society, and that the Persons are not parts of God.[7]

(D4) It is consistent with the view that classical identity exists and is not to be analyzed in terms of more fundamental sortal-relativized sameness relations like being the *same person as*.

(D5) It carries no anti-realist commitments in metaphysics.

The Social Trinitarian solution violates D1–D3. Extant versions of the Relative Identity solution violate D1, D4, or D5. As will emerge shortly, our solution, which may fruitfully be thought of as an appropriately supplemented version of the Relative Identity solution, succeeds precisely where these others fail—namely, in satisfying all five desiderata.

## 2. Sameness Without Identity and the Problem of Material Constitution

The point of departure for our solution is Aristotle's notion of "accidental sameness". Elsewhere, we have proposed (for the sake of argument, at any rate) **(p.267)** that the phenomenon of material constitution be understood in terms of accidental sameness.[8] What we here propose is that the unity of the divine Persons also be understood in terms of this relation (or more accurately, in terms of the genus of which it is a species—namely, numerical sameness without identity[9]). In this section, therefore, we review the way in which appeal to accidental sameness provides a solution to the problem of material constitution and address what we take to be the most natural objections to it.

### 2.1 Accidental Sameness Characterized

According to Aristotle, familiar particulars (trees, cats, human beings, etc.) are hylomorphic compounds—things that exist because and just so long as some matter instantiates a certain kind of form. Forms, for Aristotle, are complex organizational properties, and properties are immanent universals (or, as some have it, tropes). The matter of a thing is not itself an individual thing; rather, it is that which combines with a form to *make* an individual thing.[10] Thus, for example, a human being exists just in case some matter instantiates the complex organizational property *humanity*. Each human being depends for its continued existence on the continued instantiation of *humanity* by some matter; and each human being is appropriately viewed as a composite whose parts (at one level of

decomposition) are just its matter and (its) humanity.[11]

On Aristotle's view, living organisms are the paradigmatic examples of material objects. But Aristotle also acknowledges the existence of other hylomorphic compounds. Thus, books, caskets, beds, thresholds, hands, hearts, and various other non-organisms populate his ontology, and (like an organism) each one exists because and only so long as some matter instantiates a particular complex organizational property.[12] Indeed, Aristotle even countenances what Gareth Matthews calls "kooky" objects—objects like "seated-Socrates", a thing that comes into existence when Socrates sits down and which passes away when Socrates **(p.268)** ceases to be seated.[13] Seated-Socrates is an "accidental unity"—a unified thing that exists only by virtue of the instantiation of an accidental (non-essential) property (like seatedness) by a substance (like Socrates). The substance plays the role of matter in this sort of hylomorphic compound (though, of course, unlike matter properly conceived, the substance is a pre-existing individual thing), and the accidental property plays the role of form. Accidental sameness, according to Aristotle, is just the relation that obtains between an accidental unity and its parent substance.[14]

One might balk at this point on the grounds that Aristotle's accidental unities are just a bit *too* kooky for serious ontology. We see that Socrates has seated himself; but why believe that in doing so he has brought into existence a new object—seated-Socrates? Indeed, one might think it's clear that we*shouldn't* believe this. For there is nothing special about seatedness, and so, if we acknowledge the existence of seated-Socrates, we must also acknowledge the existence of a myriad other kooky objects: pale-Socrates, bald-Socrates, barefoot-Socrates, and so on. But surely there are not millions of objects completely overlapping Socrates.

Fair enough; and nothing here depends on our believing in seated-Socrates or his cohorts. But note that, regardless of what we think of seated-Socrates, we (fans of common sense) believe in many things relevantly *like* seated-Socrates. That is, we believe in things that are very plausibly characterized as hylomorphic compounds whose matter is *a familiar material object* and whose form is an accidental property. For example, we believe in fists and hands, bronze statues and lumps of bronze, cats and heaps of cat tissue, and so on. Why we should believe all *this* but not that sitting down is a way of replacing one kind of object (a standing-man) with another (a seated-man) is an interesting and surprisingly difficult question. But never mind that for now. The important point here is that,

whether [or not] we go along with Aristotle in believing in what *he* calls accidental unities, the fact is that many of us will be inclined to believe in things relevantly like accidental unities along with other things that are relevantly like the parent substances of accidental unities.

This last point is important because the things we have listed as being relevantly like accidental unities and their parent substances are precisely the sorts of things belief in which gives rise to the problem of material constitution. Hence the relevance of Aristotle's doctrine of accidental sameness. Aristotle agrees with common sense in thinking that there is only one material object that fills the region occupied by Socrates when he is seated. Thus, he says that the relation between accidental unities and their parent substances is a variety of *numerical sameness*. Socrates and seated-Socrates are, as he would put it, *one in number but not one in being*.[15] They are distinct, but they are to be counted as one material object.[16] But once one is committed to believing in such **(p.269)** a relation, one has a solution to the problem of material constitution ready to hand. Recall that the problem arises whenever it appears that an object *a* and an object *b* share all of the same parts and yet have different modal properties. In such cases we are pushed in the direction of denying that the relevant *a* and *b* are identical and yet we also want to avoid saying that they are *two* material objects occupying the same place at the same time. Belief in the relation of accidental sameness solves this problem because it allows us to deny that the relevant *a* and *b* are identical without thereby committing us to the claim that *a* and *b* are *two material objects*. Thus, one can continue to believe that (e.g.) there are bronze statues and lumps of bronze, that every region occupied by a bronze statue is occupied by a lump of bronze, that no bronze statue is identical to a lump of bronze (after all, statues and lumps have different persistence conditions), but also that there are never two material objects occupying precisely the same place at the same time. One can believe all this because one can say that bronze statues and their constitutive lumps stand in the relation of accidental sameness: they are one in number but not one in being.

## 2.2 Accidental Sameness Defended

But should we believe in accidental sameness? The fact of the matter is that this sort of solution to the problem of material constitution is probably the single most neglected solution to that problem in the contemporary literature; and it is not hard to see why. Initially it is hard to swallow the idea that there is a variety of *numerical* sameness that falls short of identity. But, in our view, the most

obvious and serious objections are failures, and the bare fact that the doctrine of accidental sameness is counterintuitive is mitigated by the fact that *every* solution to the problem of material constitution is counterintuitive (a fact which largely explains the problem's lasting philosophical interest). In the remainder of this section, we will address what we take to be the four most serious objections against the doctrine of accidental sameness. We will also explain how the relation of accidental sameness differs from two other relations to which it bears some superficial resemblance. In doing all this, we hope to shed further light on the metaphysics of material objects that attends belief in accidental sameness.

First objection: Most contemporary philosophers think that, for any material objects *a* and *b*, *a* and *b*are to be counted as *one* if and only if *a* and *b* are identical. Indeed, it is fairly standard to define number in terms of identity, as follows:

(1F) there is exactly one F $=_{df} \exists x(Fx \& \forall y(Fy \equiv y = x))$

(2F) there are exactly two Fs $=_{df} \exists x \exists y(Fx \& Fy \& x \neq y \& \forall z(Fz \equiv y = z \vee x = z))$

etc.

But if that is right, then it is hard to see how there could be a relation that does not obey Leibniz's Law but is nevertheless such that objects standing in that relation are to be counted as one.

Obviously enough, a believer in accidental sameness must reject standard definitions like 1F and 2F. But this does not seem to us to be an especially radical **(p.270)** move. As is often pointed out, common sense does not always count by identity.[17] If you sell a piano, you won't charge for the piano*and* for the lump of wood, ivory, and metal that constitutes it. As a fan of common sense, you will probably believe that there are pianos and lumps, and that the persistence conditions of pianos differ from the persistence conditions of lumps. Still, for sales purposes, and so for common sense counting purposes, pianos and their constitutive lumps are counted as *one material object.* One might say that common sense is wrong to count this way. But why go along with that? Even if we grant that 1F and its relatives are strongly intuitive, we must still reckon with the fact that we have strong intuitions that support the following:

> (MC) In the region occupied by a bronze statue, there is a statue and there is a lump of bronze; the lump is not identical with the statue (the statue but not the lump would be destroyed if the lump were melted down and recast

in the shape of a disc); but only one material object fills that region.

If we did not have intuitions that support MC, there would be no problem of material constitution. But if MC is true, then 1F and its relatives are false, and there seems to be no compelling reason to prefer the latter over the former.

Of course, if rejecting 1F and its relatives were to leave us without any way of defining number, then our move *would be* radical, and there would be compelling reason to give up MC. But the fact is, rejecting 1F and its relatives does not leave us in any such situation. Indeed, belief in accidental sameness doesn't even preclude us altogether from counting by identity. At worst, it simply requires us to acknowledge a distinction between sortals that permit counting by identity and sortals that do not. For example, according to the believer in accidental sameness, we do not count *material objects*by identity. Rather, we count them by numerical sameness (the more general relation of which both accidental sameness and identity are species). Thus:

(1M) there is exactly one material object $=_{df} \exists x$($x$ is a material object & $\forall y$($y$ is a material object $\equiv$ $y$ is numerically the same as $x$))

(2M) there are exactly two material objects $=_{df} \exists x \exists y$($x$ is a material object & $y$ is a material object and $x$ is not numerically the same as $y$ and $\forall z$($z$ is a material object $\equiv$ $z$ is numerically the same as $x$ or $z$ is numerically the same as $y$)

etc.

Perhaps the same is true for other familiar sortals. For example: Suppose a lump of bronze that constitutes a bronze statue is nominally, but not essentially, a statue.[18] Then the lump and the statue are distinct, and both are statues. But, intuitively, the region occupied by the lump/statue is occupied by only one statue. Thus, given the initial supposition, we should not count statues by identity either. Nevertheless, we can still grant that there are some sortals that do allow us to **(p.271)** count by identity. Likely candidates are technical philosophical sortals like "hylomorphic compound", or maximally general sortals, like "thing" or "being". For such sortals, number terms can be defined in the style of 1F and its relatives. Admittedly, the business of defining number is a bit more complicated for those who believe in accidental sameness (we must recognize at least two different styles of defining number corresponding to two different kinds of sortal terms). The important point, however, is that it is not impossible.

In saying what we have about the categories of *hylomorphic compound*, *thing*, and *being*, we grant that proponents of our Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution are committed to a kind of co-locationism. Although cases of material constitution will never, on the view we are proposing, present us with two material objects in the same place at the same time, they will present us with (at least) two *hylomorphic compounds* or *things* in the same place at the same time. But we deny that this commitment is problematic. By our lights, it is a conceptual truth that material objects cannot be co-located; but it is not a conceptual truth that hylomorphic compounds (e.g., a statue and a lump, a fist and a hand, etc.) or things (e.g., a material object and an event) cannot be co-located. We take it as an advantage of the Aristotelian solution that it respects these prima facie truths.

Second objection: To say that hylomorphic compounds, or mere things, can be co-located but material objects cannot smacks of pretense. For while it preserves the letter, it does not preserve the spirit of the intuition that material objects cannot be co-located. If counting two material objects in the same place at the same time "reeks of double counting",[19] then the same reek must attend the counting of two hylomorphic compounds or two things in the same place at the same time. At best, therefore, the Aristotelian solution is only verbally distinct from the co-locationist solution. For co-locationists and fans of accidental sameness will still have the same *metaphysical* story to tell about statues and their constitutive lumps—namely, that they are distinct, despite occupying precisely the same region of spacetime—and that metaphysical story is all that matters.

But this objection is sound only on the assumption that the properties *being a material object, being a hylomorphic compound, and being a thing* are on a par with one another. From *x* is a hylomorphic compound & *y* is a hylomorphic compound & $x \neq y$, we rightly infer that *x* and *y* are two hylomorphic compounds. And if, somehow, we come to believe that *x* and *y* are co-located, we'd have no choice but to conclude that *x* and *y* are *two* distinct hylomorphic compounds sharing the same place at the same time. The reason is that the following seems to be a necessary truth about the property of being a hylomorphic compound:

> (H1) *x* is a hylomorphic compound iff *x* is a matter-form composite; exactly one hylo-morphic compound fills a region R iff some matter instantiates exactly one form; and *x* is (numerically) the same hylomorphic compound as *y* iff *x* is a hylomorphic compound and $x = y$.

**(p.272)** According to the second objection, a parallel principle expresses a necessary truth about the property of being a material object:

> (M1) *x* is a material object iff *x* is a hylomorphic compound; exactly one material object fills a region R iff exactly one hylomorphic compound fills R; and *x* is (numerically) the same material object as *y* iff *x* is a material object and *x* = *y*.

Note that M1 is not a mere *linguistic* principle; it is a substantive claim about the necessary and sufficient conditions for having *a* material object in a region, having *exactly one* material object in a region, and having (numerically) *the same* material object in a region. But M1 is a claim that will be denied by proponents of the Aristotelian solution we have been describing here. As should by now be clear, proponents of that solution will reject M1 in favor of something like M2:

> (M2) *x* is a material object iff *x* is a hylomorphic compound; exactly one material object fills a region R iff *at least one* hylomorphic compound fills R; and *x* is (numerically) the same material object as *y* iff *x* and *y* are hylomorphic compounds sharing the same matter in common.

M2 is equivalent to M1 on the assumption that no two hylomorphic compounds can share the same matter in common; but, short of treating the technical philosophical category *hylomorphic compound*as co-extensive with the common-sense category *material object*, it is hard to see what would motivate that assumption. Thus, there is room for disagreement on the question whether M2 is true or whether M2 is equivalent to M1; and, importantly, accidental-sameness theorists and co-locationists will come down on different sides of those questions. Thus, there is a *substantive* (as opposed to a merely verbal) disagreement to be had here after all.

Two further points should be made before we move on to the third objection. First, though M2 is specifically a thesis about the property *being a material object*, the doctrine of accidental sameness makes it plausible to think that similar theses about various other properties will be true. In particular, if one thinks that sortals like “cat”, “house”, “lump”, “statue”, and so on can apply nominally to things that constitute cats, houses, lumps, or statues, then something like M2 is true of most familiar composite object kinds. Second, though it may be tempting to think that the relation of accidental sameness (or of numerical sameness without identity) is nothing other than the relation of

sharing exactly the same *matter*, as we see it, this isn't quite correct. On our view (though probably not on Aristotle's), the relation of numerical sameness without identity can hold between *immaterial* objects, so long as the relevant immaterial objects are plausibly thought of on analogy with hylomorphic compounds. Thus, it is inappropriate to say (as might so far seem natural to say) that the relation of numerical sameness without identity is nothing other than the relation of material constitution. Rather, what is appropriate to say is that material constitution is a species of numerical sameness without identity.

Third objection: The principles for counting that we have just described (i.e., H1 and M2) are apparently *inconsistent* with the doctrine of accidental sameness. To see why, consider the following argument. Let Athena be a particular **(p.273)** bronze statue; let Lump be the lump of bronze that constitutes it. Let R be the region filled by Athena and Lump. Then:

(1) Athena is identical with the material object in R whose matter is arranged statuewise.
(2) Lump is identical with the material object in R whose matter is arranged lumpwise.
(3) The material object whose matter is arranged statuewise is identical with the material object whose matter is arranged lumpwise.
(4) Therefore, Athena is identical with Lump (contrary to the doctrine of accidental sameness).

The crucial premise, of course, is premise 3; and premise 3 seems to follow directly from a proposition that is entailed by the facts of the example in conjunction with our remarks about counting—namely, that there is exactly one object in R whose matter is arranged both statuewise and lumpwise.

On reflection, however, it is easy to see that this objection is a nonstarter. For premise 3 follows *only* if the doctrine of accidental sameness is false. Numerical sameness, according to Aristotle, does not entail identity. Thus, if his view is correct, it does *not* follow from the fact that there is exactly one material object in R whose matter is arranged both statuewise and lumpwise that the object whose matter is arranged lumpwise is identical with the object whose matter is arranged statuewise. Simply to assume otherwise, then, is to beg the question. One might insist that the assumption is nevertheless highly intuitive, and therefore legitimate. But, again, the right response here is that *every* solution to the problem of material constitution is such that its denial is highly intuitive. That is why we have a problem. Successfully rejecting a solution requires

showing that the intuitive cost is higher with the objectionable solution than with some other solution; but, with respect to the doctrine of accidental sameness, this has not yet been done.

Fourth objection: We say that there is one (and only one) material object that fills a region just in case the region is filled by matter unified in any object-constituting way. So consider a region R that is filled by matter arranged both lumpwise and statuewise. What is the object in R? What are its essential properties? If there is exactly one object in R, these two questions should have straightforward answers. But they do not (at least not so long as we continue to say that there is a statue *and* a lump in R). Thus, there is reason to doubt that there could really be exactly one object in R.

This is probably the most serious objection of the lot. But there is a perfectly sensible reply: To the first question, the correct answer is that the object is both a statue and a lump; to the second question there is no correct answer.[20] If the doctrine of accidental sameness is true, a statue and its constitutive lump are numerically the same object. This fact seems sufficient to entitle believers in accidental sameness to say that the object in R "is" both a statue and a lump, so long as they don't take this to imply either that the statue is identical to the lump or that some statue or lump exemplifies contradictory essential properties. But if this view is right, how *could* **(p.274)** there be any correct answer to the question "What are its essential properties?" absent further information about whether the word "it" is supposed to refer to the statue or the lump? The pronoun is ambiguous, as is the noun ("the object in R") to which it refers.[21] Thus, we would need to disambiguate before answering the question. Does this imply that there are two material objects in R? It might appear to because we are accustomed to finding ambiguity only in cases where a noun or pronoun refers to *two* objects rather than one. But if the doctrine of accidental sameness is true, we should also expect to find such ambiguity in cases of accidental sameness. Thus, to infer from the fact of pronoun ambiguity the conclusion that there must be two objects in R is simply to beg the question against the doctrine of accidental sameness.

So much for objections. Now, in closing this section, we would like to make it clear how accidental sameness differs from two apparently similar relations.

Those who have followed the recent literature on material constitution will know that, like us, Lynne Baker has spoken of a relation that stands "between identity and separate existence" (2000: 29) and that this relation is (on her view) to be

identified with the relation of material constitution. On hearing this characterization, one might naturally think that what Baker has in mind is something very much like accidental sameness. In fact, however, the similarity between accidental sameness and Baker-style constitution ends with the characterization just quoted. Baker's definition of constitution is somewhat complicated; but for present purposes we needn't go into the details. Suffice it to say that, according to Baker, the relation of material constitution is neither symmetric nor transitive whereas accidental sameness is both symmetric and transitive. (At least, it is synchronically transitive.) Lacking the same formal properties, the two relations could not possibly be the same.[22]

One might also naturally wonder whether what we call "numerical sameness without identity" isn't just good old-fashioned *relative identity* under a different name. Different views have been advertised in the literature under the label "relative identity". But one doctrine that virtually all of these views (and certainly all that *deserve* the label) share in common is the following:

> (R1) States of affairs of the following sort are possible: *x* is an F, *y* is an F, *x* is a G, *y* is a G, *x* is the same F as y, but *x* is not the same G as y.

This is a claim that we will endorse too; and, like those who endorse the Relative-Identity solution to the problem of the Trinity, it is a truth we rely on in order to show that T1–T3 are consistent with one another. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that we say that our solution may fruitfully be thought of as a **(p.275)** version of the Relative Identity strategy. Despite our commitment to R1, it would be a mistake to suppose that we endorse a doctrine of relative identity. Our solution to the problem of the Trinity is therefore importantly different from the Relative-Identity solution in its purest form.[23]

How is it possible to accept R1 while at the same time rejecting relative identity? The answer, as we see it, is that identity is truly *relative* only if one of the following claims is true:

> (R2) Statements of the form "*x* = *y*" are incomplete and therefore ill-formed. A proper identity statement has the form "*x* is the same F as *y*".
>
> (R3) Sortal-relative identity statements are more fundamental than absolute identity statements.[24]

R2 is famously associated with P. T. Geach (1967, 1969, and 1973), whereas R3 is defended by, among others, Nicholas Griffin (1977).[25] Views according to

which classical identity exists and is no less fundamental than other sameness relations are simply not views according to which *identity* is relative. Perhaps, on those views, there are multiple sameness relations; and perhaps some of those relations are both sortal-relative and such that R1 is true of them. But so long as classical identity exists and is in no way derivative upon or less fundamental than they are, there seems to be no reason whatsoever to think of other "sameness" relations as identity relations. Thus, on views that reject both R2 and R3, there seems to be no reason for thinking that identity is relative.

The difference between accidental sameness and relative identity is important, especially in the present context, because it highlights the fact that there is more than one way to make sense of sameness without identity. It is for this reason that endorsing R1 *apart* from R2 or R3 won't suffice all by itself to solve the problem of the Trinity. As we have argued elsewhere (Rea 2003), absent an appropriate supplemental story about the metaphysics underlying relative-identity relations, endorsing R1 apart from R2 or R3 leaves one, at best, with an incomplete solution to the problem of the Trinity and, at worst, with an heretical solution.[26] We think that the doctrine of accidental sameness provides the right sort of supplemental story, and that the solution it yields (in conjunction with R1) is both complete and orthodox.

We suspect, moreover, that failure to distinguish different ways of making sense of sameness without identity is partly responsible for the attraction that the Relative-Identity solution holds for many. As is well known, respected Christian **(p.276)** philosophers and theologians—such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas—habitually speak of the Trinity in ways that require the introduction of a form of sameness that fails Leibniz's Law. But this way of speaking, it is often assumed, can only be explained in terms of relative identity.[27] In light of what has just been said, however, we can see that this assumption is false. Sameness without identity does not imply relative identity, and hence any appeal to such sameness either to determine the views of actual historical figures or to provide authoritative support for a (pure) Relative-Identity solution is wholly misguided. Relative identity does provide one way of explaining (numerical) sameness without identity, but it does not provide the only way of explaining it.

## 3. Sameness Without Identity and the Problem of the Trinity

If we accept the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution, then, as we have seen, the familiar particulars of experience must be conceived of as hylomorphic compounds—that is, as matter-form structures related to other

things sharing their matter by the relation of accidental sameness. The relevance of this Aristotelian solution to the problem of the Trinity is perhaps already clear. For like the familiar particulars of experience, the Persons of the Trinity can also be conceived of in terms of hylomorphic compounds. Thus, we can think of the divine essence as playing the role of matter; and we can regard the properties *being a Father*, *being a Son*, and *being a Spirit* as distinct forms instantiated by the divine essence, each giving rise to a distinct Person. As in the case of matter, moreover, we can regard the divine essence not as an individual thing in its own right but rather as that which, together with the requisite "form", constitutes a Person. Each Person will then be a compound structure whose matter is the divine essence and whose form is one of the three distinctive Trinitarian properties. On this way of thinking, the Persons of the Trinity are directly analogous to particulars that stand in the familiar relation of material constitution.

Of course, there are also some obvious disanalogies. For example, in contrast to ordinary material objects, the role of matter in the case of the Trinity is played by immaterial stuff, and so the structures or compounds constituted from the divine essence (namely, the divine persons) will be "hylomorphic" only in an extended sense. Also, in the case of material objects, the form of a particular hylomorphic compound will typically only be contingently instantiated by the matter. Not so, however, in the case of the Trinity. For Christian orthodoxy requires us to say that properties like *being a Father* and *being a Son* are essentially such as to be **(p.277)** instantiated by the divine essence. As we have seen, moreover, the relation of *accidental sameness* on which our solution is modeled is, in Aristotle anyway, paradigmatically a relation between a *substance* (e.g., a man) and a hylomorphic structure built out of the substance and an accidental property. The Persons, however, are not like this. Thus, it is at best misleading to say that the relation between them is one of *accidental sameness*. Better instead to go with the more general label we have used throughout this paper: the Persons stand in the relation of *numerical sameness without identity*.

As far as we can tell, none of these disanalogies are of deep import. It seems not at all inappropriate to think of the divine Persons on analogy with hylomorphic compounds; and once we do think of them this way, the problem of the Trinity disappears. Return to the analogy with material objects: According to the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution, a statue and its constitutive lump are *two* distinct hylomorphic compounds; yet they are numerically one material object. Likewise, then, the Persons of the Trinity are

*three* distinct Persons but numerically one God. The key to understanding this is just to see that the right way to count Gods resembles the right way to count material objects. Thus:

> (G1) *x* is a God iff *x* is a hylomorphic compound whose "matter" is some divine essence; *x* is the same God as *y* iff *x* and *y* are each hylomorphic compounds whose "matter" is some divine essence and x's "matter" is the same "matter" as y's; and there is exactly one God iff there is an *x*such that *x* is a God and every God is the same God as x.

And, in light of G1, the following principle also seems reasonable:

> (G2) *x* is God iff *x* is a God and there is exactly one God.

If these principles are correct, and if (as Christians assume) there are three (and only three) Persons that share the same divine essence, then we arrive directly at the central Trinitarian claims T1–T3 without contradiction. For in that case, there will be three distinct Persons; each Person will be God (and will be the same God as each of the other Persons); and there will be exactly one God. Admittedly, if G1 is taken all by itself and without explanation, it might appear just as mysterious as the conjunction of T1–T3 initially appeared. But that is to be expected. What is important is that once the parallel with M2 is appreciated, and the doctrine of numerical sameness without identity is understood and embraced, much of the mystery goes away.

We are now in a position to see how our Aristotelian account of the Trinity meets the desiderata we set out earlier for an adequate solution to the problem of the Trinity (namely, D1–D5). As should already be clear, our solution resolves the apparent inconsistency of T1–T3 in the same basic way that Relative-Identity and Social-Trinitarian solutions do: namely, by rejecting the idea that the words "is God" in Trinitarian statements like "Each of the Persons is God" mean "is absolutely identical with God". According to our solution, these words should be interpreted to mean "is numerically the same as the one and only God". But once this interpretation of T2 is adopted—together with a proper understanding of the relata of the relation of numerical sameness without identity—the apparent**(p.278)** inconsistency of T1–T3 is resolved, and in a way that satisfies D1 and D2. For inasmuch as the Persons of the Trinity are distinct hylomorphic compounds, they are distinct from one another (hence T1 is true); and inasmuch as they are each numerically the same as the one and only God, each of them is God and there is only one God (hence T2 and T3 are true). Moreover, since our

solution implies that each of the Persons is a divine individual who is *one in number* with each of the other two Persons, it is consistent with the claim that there are three Persons but exactly one divine individual (thus satisfying D1),[28] and it also seems to preserve the intention of traditional formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity (thereby satisfying D2).

It should also be clear how our solution meets the other desiderata. Unlike (pure) Relative-Identity solutions, ours is compatible with the claim that classical identity exists and is as fundamental as any other sameness relation (and hence satisfies D4). Moreover, it supplies an explanation for why "$x = y$" does not follow from "$x$ is the same God as $y$". Unlike Social-Trinitarian strategies, on the other hand, ours is clearly compatible with the view that God is an individual rather than a society, and that the Persons are not parts of God (and hence satisfies D3). Furthermore, our story about the unity of the Persons exploits what we take to be a plausible story about the unity of distinct hylomorphic compounds, whereas no similarly plausible analogy seems to be available to the social Trinitarian. Finally, though we deny that it makes sense to say, unequivocally, that each of the Persons is absolutely identical with God, our view–unlike either of the other two strategies— allows us to say that the Father is identical with God, the Son is identical with God, the Holy Spirit is identical with God, and yet the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another. And it can do all of this without introducing any anti-realist commitments in metaphysics (thus satisfying D5). Consider a parallel drawn from one of our earlier examples: Athena is identical to the material object in R; Lump is identical to the material object in R; but Athena is distinct from Lump. Since "the material object in R" is ambiguous, there is no threat of contradiction; and the doctrine of numerical sameness without identity blocks an inference to the claim that Lump and Athena are co-located material objects. Likewise in the case of the Trinity.

For all these reasons, therefore, our Aristotelian solution to the problem of the Trinity seems to us to be the most philosophically promising and theologically satisfying solution currently on offer.

## 4. Important Consequences

This completes our defense of the Aristotelian account of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As we see it, however, this account is not only interesting in its own **(p.279)**

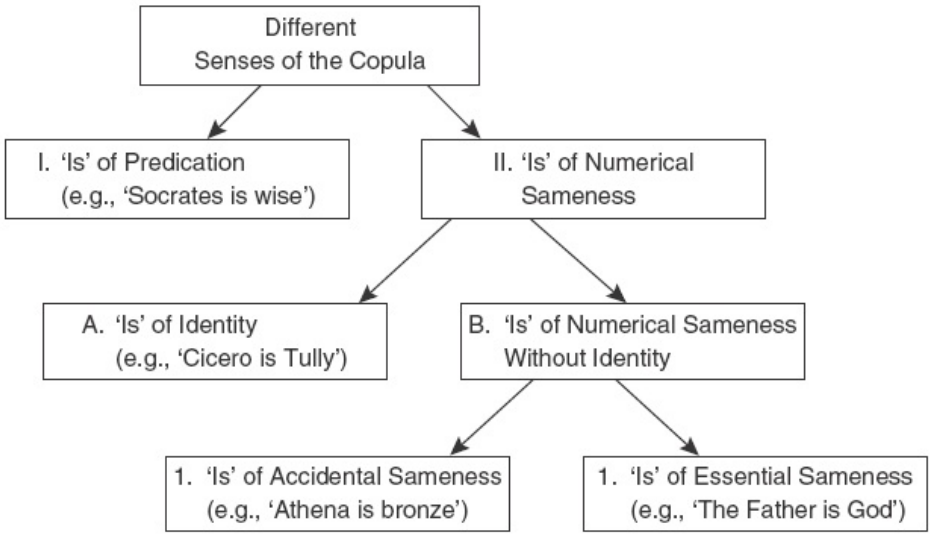



*Fig. 14.1.* Different Senses of the Copula

right, but also has several important consequences. We close by calling attention to two of these.

First, our solution suggests a revision in our understanding of the nature of the copula. Philosophers traditionally distinguish what is called the "is" of predication from the "is" of identity. It is sometimes added, moreover, that any solution to the problem of material constitution that denies that constitution is identity must introduce a third sense of "is". As Lynne Baker says:

> If the constitution view [i.e., the view that constitution is not identity] is correct, then there is a third sense of "is", distinct from the other two. The third sense of "is" is the "is" of constitution (as in "is (constituted by) a piece of marble").[29]

Baker seems to think that if constitution is not identity, there will have to be three main senses of the copula, each co-ordinate with the other two. But we can now see that this is a mistake. If our account of the Trinity is correct, constitution can be explained in terms of something other than identity (namely, accidental sameness). Even so, there will be only two main senses of the copula, namely, the traditional "is" of predication and a heretofore unrecognized sense of the copula, the "is" of numerical sameness. There will still be an "is" of identity and an "is" of constitution, as Baker suggests, but these will both be subsumed under the second of the two main senses just mentioned. Indeed, if we take into account all of the changes suggested by our account of the Trinity, we will get a

fairly complex set of relations holding between the various senses of the copula, as the diagram above makes clear.

**(p.280)** Second, our solution helps to make clear that both the problem of material constitution and the problem of the Trinity are generated in part by the fact that we have incompatible intuitions about how to *count* things. Thus, both problems might plausibly be seen as special instances of a broader*counting problem*—a problem that arises whenever we appear to have, on the one hand, a single object of one sort (e.g., *God* or *material object*) and, on the other hand, multiple coinciding objects of a different sort (e.g., *Person*, or *hylomorphic compound*). One significant advantage of the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution is that it alone seems to provide a unified strategy for resolving the broader problem of which it is an instance.[30]

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Notes:

(1) For purposes here, an object *x* and an object *y* stand in the relation of material constitution just in case *x* and *y* share all of the same *material* parts. Thus, on our view, material constitution is both symmetric and transitive. Contrary to some philosophers (e.g., Lynne Baker, discussed below) who treat material

constitution as asymmetric, we think that there are good theoretical reasons for regarding it as a symmetric relation; but we will not attempt to defend that view here.

(2) Noonan 1988: 222.

(3) Note, however, that we stop short of actually endorsing the solution that we describe. There are three reasons for this. First, our solution, like most others, attempts to provide a metaphysical account of the ultimate nature of God. But surely here, if anywhere, a great deal of circumspection is warranted. Second, the contemporary Trinitarian debate, as we see it, is still in its infancy; hence a definitive stand on any particular solution, including our own, strikes us as a bit premature. Third, the solution we develop strongly supports a specific understanding of material constitution (as will become clear in section 4)—one that is at odds with some of our previously considered views on the matter. (See, e.g., Rea 2000.) But, given the current state of the Trinitarian debate, we are uncertain whether this fact should motivate us to change our views about material constitution or to continue exploring yet other alternatives to the currently available accounts of the Trinity. Thus, it is important to understand that we are not here aiming to resolve the contemporary Trinitarian debate once and for all, but rather to advance it by introducing what seems to us to be the most promising solution to the problem of the Trinity developed so far.

(4) *Quicumque vult* (our translation).

(5) Denying that “is God” means “is absolutely identical with God” doesn’t guarantee that modalism is false; but making the denial removes any pressure toward modalism that might arise out of T1–T3.

(6) See Rea 2003 and Brower 2004a, 2004b. Proponents of the Relative-Identity strategy include Cain (1989), Anscombe & Geach (1961, pp. 118–20), Martinich (1978, 1979), and van Inwagen (1988). Proponents of the more typical versions of the Social-Trinitarian strategy include Bartel (1993, 1994), Brown (1985, 1989), Davis (1999), Layman (1988), C. Plantinga (1986, 1988, 1989), and Swinburne (1994). The position is commonly attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers. (See, esp., Brown 1985, Plantinga 1986, and Wolfson 1964.) It is against these relatively typical versions of ST that our previously published objections most straightforwardly apply. Among the less typical versions of ST are, for example, Peter Forrest's (1998), according to which the Persons are three “quasi-individuals” that result from an event of divine fission, and C. J. F.

Williams's (1994), according to which “God is the love of three Persons for each other.” We reject Forrest's view because it implies (among other things) that there is no fact about whether there are one or many Gods, and there is no fact about whether there are three or many more than three Persons. On his view, “one” is the lowest correct answer to the question “How many Gods are there?” and “three” is the lowest correct answer to the question “How many persons are there?”; but it is sheer convention that allows us to say that “one” and “three”—rather than, say “twenty” and “two hundred and forty one”—are *the* correct answers to those questions. As for Williams's view, we take it that his, along with other less common versions of ST, will fall prey to objections similar to those we raise against the more typical versions. For further critical discussion of both the Relative-Identity strategy and the Social-Trinitarian strategy, see Bartel 1988, Cartwright 1987, Clark 1996, Feser 1997, Leftow 1999, and Merricks 2005.

(7) Note that the point of D3 isn’t to deny that the Persons compose a society. Of course they do, if there are genuinely *three* Persons. Rather, the point of D3 is to deny both that the name “God” refers to the society composed of these Persons and that the Persons are *proper parts* of God. But if the society of Persons is the Trinity, and the Trinity is God, doesn’t it follow that “God” refers to the society of Persons after all? No. Each member of the Trinity is God, and God “is a Trinity” (that is, He exists in three Persons). But nothing in orthodoxy seems to require that the Trinity is itself a whole composed of three Persons and referred to by the name “God”. Moreover, in light of objections to Social Trinitarianism raised here and elsewhere, it seems that orthodoxy actually precludes us from saying such a thing (which is part of why we reject Social Trinitarianism).

(8) See Rea 1998 and Brower 2004a, 2004b.

(9) For reasons that we shall explain below, the label “accidental sameness” is not appropriate in the context of the Trinity.

(10) This claim is negotiable; and, in fact, there are independent (non-Aristotelian) reasons for thinking that “masses of matter” *must* be treated as individuals. (See, e.g., Zimmerman 1995.) But the view of matter articulated here seems to comport best with Aristotle's metaphysics and with the solution to the problem of the Trinity that we will propose, and so we will go ahead and endorse it here. Those who think of masses of matter as individuals may be inclined (in section 3 below) also to think of what we will call “the divine essence” as an individual. Were we to endorse this view, we would deny that the

divine essence is a fourth Person or a second God (just as we would deny that Socrates's matter is a second man co-located with Socrates). Rather, we would say that the divine essence is one in number with God, a *sui generis* individual distinct from the Persons and, indeed, nothing other than a substrate for the Persons. We would also deny that there is any sense in which the divine essence is prior to or independent of God.

(11) We place “its” in parentheses to signal our neutrality on the question whether, say, the humanity of Plato is a special kind of trope or a multiply instantiated universal.

(12) See, e.g., *Metaphysics* H2, 1042b15–25.

(13) Matthews 1982, 1992.

(14) Topics A7, 103a23–31; Physics A3, 190a17–21, 190b18–22; Metaphysics D6, 1015b16–22, 1016b32–1017a6; Metaphysics D9, 1024b30–1.

(15) Topics A7, 103a23–31; Metaphysics D6, 1015b16–22, 1016b32–1017a6.

(16) And, we might add, the same would hold true for Socrates and his matter, if indeed the matter of a thing were to be understood as an individual distinct from that thing.

(17) See, e.g., Lewis 1993: 175, and Robinson 1985.

(18) An object belongs to a kind in the *nominal* way just in case it displays the superficial features distinctive of members of that kind.

(19) Lewis 1986: 252.

(20) We assume that “object” in the context here means “material object”.

(21) Here is why “the object in R” is ambiguous. There aren’t *two* material objects in R; and the material object in R isn’t a third thing in addition to Athena and Lump. Thus, “Athena = the material object in R” and “Lump = the material object in R” must both express truths. But they can’t both express truths unless either Lump = Athena (which the doctrine of accidental sameness denies) or “the material object in R” is ambiguous.

(22) Baker's definition appears in both Baker 1999 and Baker 2000. For critical discussion, see Pereboom 2002, Rea 2002, Sider 2002, and Zimmerman 2002.

(23) Elsewhere we distinguish between *pure* and *impure* versions of the Relative Identity strategy (see Rea 2003). Impure versions endorse R1 without endorsing a doctrine of relative identity; pure versions endorse R1 in conjunction with either R2 or R3 below. Our solution is thus an impure version of the Relative Identity solution.

(24) To say that sortal-relative identity statements are more fundamental than absolute identity statements is, at least in part, to say that absolute identity statements are to be *analyzed* or *defined* in terms of more primitive sortal-relative identity statements, rather than the other way around. See Rea2003 for further discussion of views that endorse R3.

(25) See also Routley & Griffin 1979.

(26) This is, roughly, the problem that we think Peter van Inwagen's solution to the problem of the Trinity faces. (Cf. Rea 2003.)

(27) For example, Cartwright (1987: 193) claims to detect an appeal to relative identity in a letter of Anselm, as well as the Eleventh Council of Toledo, on just these grounds. The same sort of reasoning may also help to explain Anscombe & Geach's (1961: 118) attribution of the Relative-Identity solution to Aquinas.

(28) Assuming, anyway, that counting *divine individuals* is more like counting Gods than counting Persons. But this assumption seems clearly legitimate in context of D1.

(29) Baker 1999: 51.

(30) This paper has benefited greatly from the advice and criticism of Michael Bergmann, Jan Cover, Tom Crisp, William Hasker, John Hawthorne, Michael Jacovices, Brian Leftow, Trenton Merricks, Laurie Paul, William Rowe, and two anonymous referees for *Faith and Philosophy*.

# Does the Problem of Material Constitution Illuminate the Doctrine of the Trinity?

**William Lane Craig**

In a provocative and carefully argued paper,[1] Michael Rea and Jeffrey Brower (hereafter R-B) have offered a creative, new way of understanding the Trinity based on the analogy of hylomorphic composition as understood by Aristotle. They present their solution as "the most philosophically promising and theologically satisfying solution currently on offer."[2]

R-B formulate the problem of the Trinity in terms of the seeming incompatibility of the three theses

($T_1$) Each person of the Trinity is distinct from each of the others.

($T_2$) Each person of the Trinity is God.

($T_3$) There is exactly one God.

These three theses appear to imply that three distinct beings are each identical with one being, which is incoherent.

Like the Social Trinitarian and the Relative Identity theorist, R-B avert incoherence by denying that ($T_2$) is a statement of absolute identity. They reject, however, the usual Social Trinitarian and Relative Identity interpretations of ($T_2$) in favor of an interpretation inspired by an Aristotelian account of material constitution. In their view ($T_2$) should be understood in terms of numerical sameness without identity.

The relation of numerical sameness without identity features prominently in Aristotle's treatment of material constitution. Aristotle believed in a wide range of hylomorphic compounds, objects constituted by matter plus some organizing form. R-B explain that he even accepted the reality of strange objects like "seated Socrates," which temporarily exists while Socrates is sitting down and is composed of a thing which is a substance in its own right (Socrates) plus some accidental form (seatedness). Although R-B acknowledge the kookiness of objects like seated Socrates, they insist that fans of common sense do

**(p.284)** believe in many things relevantly *like* seated Socrates. That is, we

> believe in things that can very plausibly be characterized as hylomorphic compounds whose matter is a *familiar material object* and whose form is an accidental property. We believe in fists and hands, bronze statues and lumps of bronze, gold coins and lumps of gold, cats and heaps of cat tissue, and so on.[3]

In each case, the first member of the pair is composed of the second member of the pair, which is taken to be an object in its own right, plus some accidental form. But such a belief gives rise to the problem of material constitution. For a fist is not the same thing as a hand (a fist is essentially clenched whereas a hand is not), and yet when the hand takes the shape of a fist, there are not two material objects present but only one. R-B explain that for Aristotle the hand and the fist are distinct in being but one in number, that is to say, although the hand and the fist are distinct entities, they are only one material object. When the hand is clenched, the hand and the fist are numerically the same without being identical. R-B acknowledge that it is hard to swallow the idea that numerical sameness need not involve identity, but they dismiss such mental reservations, observing that any solution to the problem of material constitution is going to be counter-intuitive.

Assuming the acceptability of the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution, R-B explain its relevance to the doctrine of the Trinity:

> …the Persons of the Trinity can also be conceived of in terms of hylomorphic compounds. Thus, we can think of the divine essence as playing the role of matter, and we can regard the properties*being a Father, being a Son*, and *being a Spirit* as distinct forms instantiated by the divine essence, each giving rise to a distinct Person. As with matter, we regard the divine essence not as an individual thing in its own right but rather as that which, together with the requisite "form," constitutes a Person. Each Person will then be a compound structure whose matter is the divine essence and whose form is one of the three distinctive Trinitarian properties. On this way of thinking, the Persons of the Trinity are directly analogous to particulars that stand in the familiar relation of material constitution.[4]

R-B proceed to note three disanalogies between the case of the Trinity and cases of familiar material constitution:

> 1. In the case of the Trinity, unlike the case of a material object, the role of matter is played by non-matter, and so the structures or compounds

> constituted from it (namely, divine persons) will be “hylomorphic” only in an extended or analogical sense.
> 2. In the case of material objects, the form in a particular hylomorphic compound will typically only be contingently instantiated by the matter. Not so, however, in the case of the Trinity. For Christian orthodoxy requires us to say that properties like *being a Father* and*being a Son* are essentially such as to be instantiated by the divine essence.
> **(p.285)** 3. The relation of *accidental sameness* on which our solution is modeled is, in Aristotle anyway, paradigmatically a relation between a *substance* (e.g., a man) and a hylomorphic structure built out of the substance and an accidental property. The Persons, however, are not like this. Thus, it is at best misleading to say that the relation between them is one of *accidental sameness*. Better instead to go with the other label we have used…: the persons stand in the relation of numerical sameness without identity.[5]

While acknowledging these disanalogies, R-B think that they are of little import. They conclude,

> It seems not at all inappropriate to think of the divine Persons on analogy with hylomorphic compounds; and once they are thought of this way, the problem of the Trinity disappears. Return to the analogy with material objects: According to the Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution, a statue and its constitutive lump are *two* distinct hylo-morphic compounds; yet they are numerically one material object. Likewise, then, the Persons of the Trinity are *three* distinct Persons but numerically one God.[6]

R-B's account does not wear its interpretation on its face. Some careful exegesis is required if we are to understand the purported analogy.

What, to begin with, do R-B mean by “the divine essence”? They surely do not mean, one thinks, that the divine essence is a sort of immaterial stuff which is formed into the Trinitarian persons, as the analogy with hylomorphism suggests. This is surely to press the matter/form analogy too far. On the orthodox view God is not composed out of any sort of stuff, and it is difficult in any case to make sense of immaterial stuff (as opposed to an immaterial substance or thing). So charity would seem to demand that we interpret the “divine essence” to designate something other than the stuff of which the Father, Son, and Spirit are composed.[7]

But in fact R-B *do* mean to affirm that the divine essence is the stuff out of which the Trinitarian persons are "made."[8] In personal correspondence, Rea explains, "Actually, we are suggesting that the Persons are composed of the divine essence plus some form.…The idea is that the divine essence plays the role of "commonly shared matter" among the Persons, and the Persons stand to one another in the relation of NSWI [Numerical Sameness without Identity]."[9]

**(p.286)** But in this case, the first disanalogy they note—that the role of matter is played by non-matter—looms exceedingly large. Rea avers,

> All we mean to commit ourselves to is the idea that maybe the Persons are like a hylomorphic structure: there's something (we call it "the divine essence" to connect with the portions of the tradition that say that the Persons are "of one essence" or "of one substance"; but you could call it something else if you like) that plays the role of commonly shared matter, and, for each Person, something else that plays the role of form.[10]

This explanation fails to allay one's misgivings. When the tradition affirms that the persons of the Trinity are of one essence or substance, it did not mean to affirm that there is some common stuff or substratum shared by the persons, but rather that the persons share the same generic nature or are one being. The latter interpretation corresponds to Aristotle's primary sense of "substance" and the former to his secondary sense of "substance." The affirmation of the Council of Nicea that the Father and the Son are *homoousios* could be understood to mean that they share the same essence and are therefore equally divine. But the persons of the Trinity are not like three distinct men who all share the same generic essence of manhood; rather they are also one substance in the sense that they are one subsisting thing, one God, not three Gods. What the tradition did not mean was that God or the persons of the Trinity were composed of some sort of spiritual stuff.

In fact, the adoptionist Paul of Samosata, according to the accounts given by Basil and Athanasius, tried to pin on the partisans of Nicea precisely the charge that their use of *homoousios* with respect to the Father and the Son implied that the Father and the Son have a common constitutive substance, which even Paul took to be absurd. Basil vehemently rejects any such implication:

> For they [Paul's sympathizers] maintained that the homoousion set forth the idea both of essence and of what is derived from it, so that the essence, when divided, confers the title of co-essential on the parts into which it is

> divided. This explanation has some reason in the case of bronze and coins made therefrom, but in the case of God the Father and God the Son there is no question of substance anterior or even underlying both; the mere thought and utterance of such a thing is the last extravagance of impiety.[11]

In the case of the persons of the Trinity or God there is just nothing analogous to the role played by matter in material things. Indeed, as already mentioned, the idea of an immaterial stuff, of which God or a divine person consists, seems scarcely intelligible. At a minimum, R-B owe us a fuller explanation of how the divine persons can be taken to be analogous to hylomorphic compounds.

Once we understand that R-B *do* mean to affirm that the divine essence is a sort of stuff of which the Trinitarian persons consist, then the analogy they draw with hylomorphic compounds becomes clear. The divine essence is like matter, **(p.287)** and that is why it is not a thing. The divine essence is not like the hand or the man which are formed respectively into the fist or the seated man, for that would require the divine essence to be both a thing in its own right and numerically the same as but not identical with each divine person, which would not solve the problem of the Trinity and is not what R-B want to affirm. That is why in their third disanalogy R-B point out that their solution differs from their paradigm examples of material constitution in that Trinity does not involve a relation between a substance and a hylomorphic compound (whether the relation is accidental or essential is incidental to the disanalogy). Rather the divine essence is like unformed matter and when imbued with the relevant personal form constitutes a Trinitarian person. So each person is like a hylomorphic compound, just as the hand and the fist are each compounds formed out of a common matter. So far numerical sameness without identity does not enter the picture.

That peculiar relation comes into play when R-B assert that “the Persons of the Trinity are directly analogous to particulars that stand in the familiar relation of material constitution.” The particulars they refer to here are things like the hand and the fist, and the familiar relation referred to is presumably the relation of numerical sameness without identity, in which the hand and fist stand to each other. Composed of a common matter, the hand and the fist are two different things which are nonetheless one object. Analogously, the persons of the Trinity, composed of a common divine stuff, are three different things (persons) which are nonetheless one object (God).

So what R-B want to say is that the relation between the Father and the Son, for

example, is like the relation between the hand and the fist: numerical sameness without identity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct entities but count as one object, which is God. Just as the hand and the fist are composed of the same matter plus an accidental form, so the persons of the Trinity are composed of the same divine essence plus certain person-individuating properties. So in the Trinity we have a sort of immaterial stuff constituting three persons who are numerically the same object while being non-identical.

Further interpretive difficulties arise. In their second disanalogy to typical cases of material constitution, R-B claim that Christian orthodoxy requires them to say that properties like *being a Father* are essentially such as to be instantiated by the divine essence. Is this what R-B really want to say? The claim appears to assume that *being a Father* is a transcendent or Platonic universal which essentially exemplifies the second order property of *being instantiated by the divine essence*. This does not, however, preclude this property's being exemplified by something else as well. If we adjust the second-order property to be *being instantiated only by the divine essence*, then the case of the Trinity is not disanalogous to material objects, because the property, e.g., *being Michelangelo's "David"* plausibly exemplifies essentially the second-order property *being instantiated only by such-and-such marble*, i.e., the statue could not have been made of wood or ice. What R-B want to say, I think, is that the divine essence has the essential property of *being a Father*. But if the divine essence is the Father, then why would the divine essence not be identical with the Father? The indefinite description "a Father" cannot be **(p.288)** taken to fail to designate uniquely God the Father, if we are to have an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. If some matter has essentially the property of being a particular statue, then it is identical to that statue. It might be thought that one could avoid this problem by holding that the divine essence exemplifies other essential properties peculiar to itself and so is not identical with the Father. But the difficulty with this reply is that that does not seem to be possible on the R-B view. R-B, on the other hand, cannot allow the divine essence to be identical with the Father, for it is not an object, and if it were then the transitivity of identity would imply the Father's identity with the Son. What R-B want to say is that the divine essence has the essential property, not of *being a Father*, but rather of *constituting a Father*. The divine essence essentially constitutes but is not identical with its object. It would be as though some gold essentially exemplified the property *constituting the last-minted* U.S. *twenty-dollar* coin or some marble essentially exemplified the *property constituting Michelangelo's "David"*.

The question, then, is whether construing the persons of the Trinity on the analogy of hylomorphic compounds serves to illuminate the doctrine of the Trinity or to provide us with a coherent model of the three in one. Here I must confess that I fail to see that R-B's proposal sheds much light on that doctrine.

R-B believe that once we think of the divine persons on the analogy of hylomorphic compounds, the problem of the Trinity disappears. But this is far too quick. For the unity and diversity in material constitution do not seem at all analogous to the unity and diversity in the Trinity. In the case of material constitution, we are supposed to come to see that a hand and a fist, for example, or a lump of marble and a statue, are two non-identical things which count as one material object. The analogy to this is that the Father, for example, though non-identical with the Son, is numerically the same spiritual object as the Son. This analogy will hold for each of the divine persons. Of each one it can be said that it is not identical with but numerically the same spiritual object as the other divine persons.

But this does nothing to resolve the Trinitarian aporia. It does not tell us how seemingly mutually exclusive hylomorphic compounds can be numerically the same object. We are told that one object can be both a hand and a fist. All right. But how can one object be simultaneously a clenched fist and an open hand? How can a quantity of gold be at once a U.S. twenty-dollar coin and a Spanish doubloon? How can Socrates be at once seated Socrates, standing Socrates, and reclining Socrates? How can the Winged Victory and the David and the Venus de Milo be numerically the same object? These are the correct analogies to the Trinity, where the same spiritual object is said to be at once the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Work on the use of personal indexicals in recent decades has served to highlight strikingly the exclusivity and privacy of the first-person perspective.[12] Others may **(p.289)** know that William Craig is the second child of Mallory and Doris Craig, but I alone can know that I am the second child of Mallory and Doris Craig; no one else can access my first-person perspective nor can this same knowledge be reduced to a third-person perspective. Thus, among the three persons of the Trinity there are three irreducible and exclusive first-person perspectives which not even the classic doctrine of *perichoreisis* can dissolve. The Father knows, for example, that the Son dies on the cross, but He does not and cannot know that He Himself dies on the cross—indeed, the view that He so knows even has the status of heresy: *patripassianism*. Thus how the three persons of the Trinity can be numerically the same spiritual object remains as

mysterious and problematic as how three statues can each be one and the same material object.

R-B admit that the explication

> ($R_1$) *x* is a God iff *x* is a hylomorphic compound whose matter is some divine essence; *x* is the same God as *y* iff *x* and *y* are each hylomorphic compounds whose matter is some divine essence and *x*'s matter is the same matter as *y*'s; and there is exactly one God iff there is an *x* such that *x* is a God and every God is the same God as *x*

when taken all by itself and in isolation is apt to appear "just as mysterious as the conjunction of $T_1$–$T_3$."[13] But they claim that "much of the mystery goes away" once we appreciate the parallelism of ($R_1$) to a principle concerning material constitution, namely,

> ($M_2$) *x* is a material object iff *x* is a hylomorphic compound; exactly one material object fills a region R iff at least one hylomorphic compound fills R; and *x* is (numerically) the same material object as *y* iff *x* and *y* are hylomorphic compounds sharing the same matter in common.

It seems evident that the mystery remains unrelieved by this parallel. ($M_2$) tells us that the David and a marble lump are each a material object; that they are numerically the same object just in case they share the same matter; and that if both of them fill R there is only one object that fills R. But it remains wholly obscure how the David and the Venus de Milo could share the same matter and so be numerically the same material object or how they could both fill R. But this is the sort of thing that ($M_2$) must render intelligible if it is to elucidate ($R_1$), which means to explicate the Father's being the same spiritual object or God as the Son. The mystery remains.

R-B proceed to make further problematic claims. They state that their view allows us to say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each identical with God, and yet they are mutually distinct.[14] This is due to the ambiguity of the sortal **(p.290)** term "God." Again they appeal to the analogy of material constitution.[15] Imagine two hylomorphic compounds, like a statue and a marble lump, filling the region R. What is the material object that fills R? R-B reply that it is both a statue and a lump. The expression "the object that fills R" is ambiguous and can refer to either the statue or the lump. Thus, the David is

identical to the material object in R, and so is its constitutive lump of marble, but the David is distinct from the marble lump due to the ambiguity of "the material object in R." Analogously, the sortal "God" is ambiguous. When one says the Father is identical with the spiritual object which is God one picks out a distinct entity from what is picked out when one says the Son is identical with the spiritual object which is God, even though numerically these are the same object.

R-B's claim that each of the divine persons is identical with God is very problematic. *Prima facie* it contradicts their earlier assertion that on their view ($T_2$) is not to be interpreted as the affirmation that each of the persons "is absolutely identical with God," but rather as an affirmation of numerical sameness *without* identity.[16] So which is it? A charitable interpretation would be that these two interpretations are affirmed to be equally viable, alternate readings of ($T_2$) on the R-B view. On the identity interpretation, the relation of numerical sameness without identity obtains only between the persons of the Trinity, but not between each person and the spiritual object called God. The relation between each person and that object is absolute identity, but due to the ambiguity of the term "God" arising from relations of numerical sameness without identity between the persons of the Trinity, different entities are picked out by various Trinitarian identity statements like "The Father is God," "The Son is God," and so on, and so transitivity of identity does not come into play. By contrast, on the numerical sameness without identity interpretation, relations of numerical sameness without identity are said to obtain not only between the persons of the Trinity, but also between each person and the spiritual object called God. Each person is said to be numerically the same as but not identical to the object God, as well as each other. Curiously, R-B have said almost nothing to motivate this latter interpretation, though they give it pride of place, since they have concentrated on analyzing the inter-personal relations in the Trinity in terms of numerical sameness without identity, not the relations between the persons and the spiritual object God.

Difficulties persist. In the first place, even if "the object that fills R" is ambiguous when referring to the David or its constitutive lump of marble, it is not ambiguous when it comes to picking out either the David or the Winged Victory. The David and the lump can both fill R and so be ambiguously referred to by "the object that fills R." But the David and the Winged Victory cannot, to all appearances, both fill R, so there is no ambiguity in their regard. Similarly, is it not implausible to think that "God" is ambiguous when it comes to the Father and the Son? Given the exclusivity and privacy of the first-person perspective,

persons are as impenetrable as statues. So how could they both fill R? Parity would suggest **(p.291)** that just as in the case of the David and the Winged Victory we have two material objects, so in the case of the Father and the Son we have two spiritual objects, two Gods.

Second, R-B explain that due to the ambiguity of the phrase "the object that fills R," there is no correct answer to the question of what are the essential properties of the object in R.[17] One has to disambiguate before answering the question concerning what the essential properties of the object are. But this seems to imply that the question as to the essential properties of the spiritual object called "God" is equally unanswerable. That question can be answered only relative to some disambiguating description. But this seems to be the very feature of Relative Identity which R-B pronounced "catastrophic" and "disastrous" when applied to the Trinity.[18] The numerically same object can be either identical to the Father or identical to the Son dependent upon how we choose to describe it. But R-B rejected Relativity Identity because "we do not want to say that the very existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a theory-dependent matter. Nor do we want to say that the distinction of the Persons is somehow relative to our ways of thinking or theorizing. That appears to be a form of modalism."[19] It is hard to see how R-B can avoid a similar charge. They might say that the Father and Son are really non-identical on their view, but that our linguistic terms "Father" and "Son" are ambiguous in their reference. But then it is inaccurate to say that statements like "The Father is identical with God" are true, for the terms do not unambiguously refer. If the statements are true and the ambiguity is ontological, then one does seem guilty of making identity relative to one's thinking or theorizing.

In sum, the disanalogies between the Aristotelian account of material constitution and the doctrine of the Trinity seem so great that appeal to that account does little to illuminate the Christian doctrine. If anything, the analogy of material constitution ought to incline us to think that the divine essence cannot constitute the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at once. All this has been said on the assumption that the strange doctrine of numerical sameness without identity is metaphysically acceptable, which assumption is, it scarcely needs to be said, moot.[20] I do not intend these criticisms of the R-B proposal as a refutation of the model so much as an invitation to further reflection on it. Rea and Brower have offered us a provocative, new way of understanding the Trinity, but they still **(p.292)** have a lot of explaining to do before their interpretation becomes illuminating or plausible. I hope that these brief criticisms will be a

spur to further exploration of their model.[21] In the meantime I have elsewhere offered a quite different social model of the Trinity which I venture to think escapes all their criticisms of Social Trinitarianism.[22]

Notes:

(1) Jeffrey Brower and Michael C. Rea, “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* (in this issue) [= this volume, ch. 14].

(2) Ibid., p. [268].

(3) Ibid., p. [268].

(4) Ibid., p. [276].

(5) Ibid., p. [277].

(6) Ibid.

(7) Taking the divine essence in the customary senses to be either an Aristotelian primary or secondary substance leads, however, into inevitable *cul-de-sacs*. If we take the divine essence to be a universal, then it seems unintelligible how a property's exemplifying another property could give rise to a living, concrete person. But if we take “the divine essence” in a medieval sense to designate the concrete reality we normally call God, then it is an object, which R-B deny.

(8) Rea writes: “The divine essence is that which combines with *being a Father* to ‘make’ the Father. (Not that the Father is ‘made,’ of course; I just don’t have a better term off the top of my head right now” (Michael C. Rea to William Lane Craig, 24 August, 2003). I think that the German *bestehen aus*captures nicely what Rea wants to say by the locution “to be made of” without implying that God is a creature. I shall render this in English as “consists of.”

(9) Michael C. Rea to William Lane Craig, 24 August, 2003.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Basil of Caesarea *Epistle* 52.1; cf. Athanasius *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia [De synodis]* 45. According to Athanasius Paul's “attempted sophistry” lay in taking *homoousios* “in a bodily sense,” when it “has not this meaning when used of things immaterial, and especially of God.”

(12) John Perry, “The Problem of the Essential Indexical,” *Noûs* 13 (1979): 3–

29; idem, “Frege on Demonstratives,” *Philosophical Review* 86 (1977): 474–497; idem, “Castañeda on He and I,” in *Agent, Language, and Structure of the World*, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), pp. 15–42. For discussion, see David Lewis, “Attitudes De Dicto and De Se,” *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 513–543; Palle Yourgrau, “Frege, Perry, and Demonstratives,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 12 (1982): 725–752; Patrick Grim, “Against Omniscience: The Case from Essential Indexicals,” *Noûs* 19 (1985): 151–180; Howard Wettstein, “Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?”*Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 188; William Seager, “The Logic of Lost Lingens,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 19 (1990): 407–428.

(13) Rea and Brower, “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” p. [277].

(14) Ibid., p. [278].

(15) Ibid., pp. [277–278].

(16) Ibid., p. [278].

(17) Ibid., p. [273].

(18) Rea, “Relative Identity and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” pp. [259, 260].

(19) Rea and Brower, “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” p. [260].

(20) For example, I should like R-B to reflect on the implications of their view for diachronic identity. All of the cases they consider are cases of synchronic identity. For example, the hand, when clenched, is said to be at once a hand and a fist. These two things are non-identical entities but are numerically the same material object. So what about the case in which the hand is open at $t_1$ and clenched at $t_2$? It seems that the first material object is not identical with the second. This is to deny diachronic identity and intrinsic change. Perhaps it could be said that the object at $t_1$ is identical with the object at $t_2$once the latter is disambiguated and described as a hand. But then, paradoxically, the hand has not changed from $t_1$ to $t_2$! For qua hand it remains the same. Rather a new being has come into existence at $t_2$ along with the hand, namely the fist, which is not identical to the hand. Thus, intrinsic change seems to be impossible.

(21) I am deeply grateful to Mike and Jeff for their comments on the first draft of this paper, which helped to clarify their view and saved me from a disastrous misinterpretation of it.

(22) See chapter 29 of J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003). In his paper “Polytheism and Christian Belief” (American Academy of Religion meeting, Atlanta, Nov. 23, 2003), Rea makes passing reference to our chapter; but however effective his criticisms may be of other social Trinitarian theories, they fail to touch our version because Rea does not engage our constructive proposal that God is a single soul with three sets of rational faculties.

# Defending the Consistency of the Doctrine of the Trinity

**Christopher Hughes**

According to the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity,

(1) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three (different) persons.
(2) The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.
(3) There is just one God.

Are (1)–(3) logically consistent? Someone might argue that they are not, in the following way:

Suppose (2) is true. Then either

(2′) The Father is a God, and the Son is a different God.

or

(2″) The Father is a God, and the Son is that same God.

If (2′) is true, then there are two different Gods—the God that the Father is, and the different God that the Son is. So (2′) is inconsistent with (3). And, although (2″) is consistent with (3), it is inconsistent with (1).

Why? If (as (1) implies) the Father and the Son are different persons, and (as (2″) implies) the Father and the Son are the same God, then the Father and the Son are different persons, but the same God. But*the Father and the Son are different persons* is logically equivalent to

(a) The Father is a person, and the Son is a person, and the Father ≠ the Son.

And *the Father and the Son are the same God* is logically equivalent to

(b) The Father is a God, and the Son is a God, and the Father = the Son.

**(p.294)** Since (a) and (b) are inconsistent (the Father and the Son cannot be both identical to and distinct from each other), we may conclude that (2″) and (1) are inconsistent.

Summing up: if (2) is true, either (2′) or (2″) must be true. If (2′) is true, (3) must

be false; if (2″) is true, (1) must be false. Hence if (2) is true, either (1) or (3) must be false, in which case (1)–(3) are inconsistent.

In what follows, I shall consider four different strategies for defending the consistency of the doctrine of the Trinity from this argument. The first of the strategies will be "logically conservative," in that it will not depart from any of the assumptions philosophical logicians typically make about identity, sameness, and counting. By bringing out problems for the first strategy, I hope to motivate consideration of two non-conservative strategies. But, I shall argue, both non-conservative strategies are problematic. I shall conclude with a consideration (and partial defense) of a fourth strategy which, in spite of resembling the third strategy in certain ways, is logically conservative.

## II

Richard Swinburne writes:

> The doctrine [of the Trinity] involves the claim that there is only one God, but three divine individuals, each of whom is God…If "there is only one God" meant "there is only one divine individual," then the doctrine of the Trinity would be manifestly self-contradictory. So clearly Church councils in affirming both must have understood "there is only one God" in a somewhat subtler sense—since no person and no Council affirming something which they intend to be taken with utter seriousness can be read as affirming an *evident* contradiction. What in denying tritheism, the view that there are three Gods, were Councils ruling out? I suggest that they were denying that there were three *independent* divine beings, any of which could exist without the other, or which could act independently of each other.
>
> On the account which I have given, the three divine individuals taken together would form a collective source of the being of all other things… This collective would be indivisible in its being…[and] in its causal action…The claim that "there is only one God" is to be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity.
>
> How then is the claim that each of the individuals is "God" to be understood? Simply as the claim that each is divine—omnipotent, perfectly good, etc.…There is an ambiguity in the Greek and Latin of the creeds, which justifies a different understanding of θεός and *deus*…in different

> places in the creeds. Both words may function either as a predicate meaning "a god" (a divine individual, in some sense of "divine" without any implication of uniqueness) or as a referring expression "God" (being either the proper name or the definite description of the, in some sense, unique Supreme Being).[1]

> **(p.295)** [I read] the *deus* (*θεός*) which the Father, Son, and Spirit are each said to be, differently from the *deus* (*θεος*) which is used when it is said that there are not three *dei* but one *deus.*Unless we do this, it seems to me that the traditional formulas are self-contradictory.[2]

Swinburne seems to be saying here that three different divine individuals form one collective, which collective is the source of being of everything else. In the traditional formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity, the word "God" is ambiguous between "divine individual" and "divine collective." If we (stipulatively) use the term "god" to mean "divine individual," and the term "God" to mean "divine collective," we can say that each of the three divine beings is a person and a god; the collective (and only the collective) is God. The three gods are the beings that "to speak strictly…have the divine properties of omnipotence, omniscience, etc.," although there is a "ready and natural sense" in which the collective can also be said to have them.[3]

If I have understood Swinburne, a "Swinburnean" response to the anti-Trinitarian argument under consideration would take this form:

The anti-Trinitarian argues as follows: if, as (2) implies, the Father is God and the Son is God, then either (2′) the Father and the Son are different Gods, or (2″) the Father and the Son are the same God. If (2′) is true, (3) must be false, and if (2″) is true, (1) must be false. But once we distinguish between the one God and the three gods, we can see that the dilemma at issue is a false one. It is false that

> (2*) The Father and the Son are the same god.

and true that

> (2**) The Father and the Son are different gods.

(At least as long as "is" is understood in the most straightforward way) it is false both that

> (2+) The Father and the Son are the same God.

and that

(2++) The Father and the Son are different Gods.

After all, (given the straightforward way of understanding “is”), (2+) can be factored into

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Father = the Son.

and (2++) can be factored into

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Father ≠ the Son.

—both of which are false, given that neither the Father nor the Son is a collective, and God is a collective. Once we distinguish (2*) and (2**) from (2+) and (2++), **(p.296)** we can see that the Trinitarian can quite consistently hold that the Father and the Son are different persons and different gods, even though there is only one God. The Trinitarian can even say (consistently) that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are three different persons and one God. To use an example of Gilbert Ryle's, a (not very well informed) tourist who had seen Balliol, Oriel, and the other Oxford colleges might believe that he hadn’t yet seen Oxford University. In disabusing the tourist, someone might say to him: “you don’t understand; the colleges *are* the university.” In the same sense that the many colleges are (that is, form) the university, we can say that the three persons are (that is, form) the one God; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are (individually) three persons—and three gods—and are (collectively) one God.

The Swinburnean response to the anti-Trinitarian argument has many attractions. It is quite straightforward, and does not invoke any concepts that the anti-Trinitarian could protest are intolerably obscure. Moreover, it appeals to no problematic logical doctrines.

There is no evident logical inconsistency in the idea that three different divine individuals jointly constitute the collective source of being of everything else (a source indivisible in being and in action). It is not clear, however, that we can infer from this that there is no evident logical inconsistency in (1)–(3), or in the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity.

On the Swinburnean approach, we can see that (2) is compatible with both (1) and (3), once we see that (2) says the Father is (a) god, and the Son is (a) god, and the Holy Spirit is (a) god, whilst (3) says that there is only one God. This is so only if the ordinary English term “God” (as opposed to the homophonic term

that is stipulatively defined to mean “divine collective”) is ambiguous between “divine individual” and “divine collective.” But I’m not at all sure that the English term is ambiguous in that way. Suppose, to take the standard example, that the word “bank” is ambiguous between “money bank” and “river bank.” Then there will be a true reading of a sentence such as “there is just one bank near the Strand, but there isn’t just one bank near the Strand.” To be sure, one wouldn’t put things that way, unless one could somehow make it clear that the “bank” in the first part of the sentence meant “river bank,” and the “bank” in the second part of the sentence meant “money bank” (say, by pointing to the river bank as one (emphatically) said the first “bank,” and pointing to the money bank as one (emphatically) said the second “bank”). Analogously, if “God” is ambiguous between “divine individual” and “divine collective,” then there is a true reading of “there is just one God, but there isn’t just one God.” And it doesn’t seem to me at all obvious that there is such a reading. Imagine someone saying “there is just one God [pointing at a painting or drawing of the Trinity in such a way as to indicate that she is directing our attention to the whole painting or drawing], but there isn’t just one God [pointing to the part of the painting or drawing that represents God the Father].” In such a case it's quite unclear (to me, at any rate) that what was said is literally true, or even logically consistent (perhaps the closest true or consistent statement in the neighborhood is something along the lines of “there is just one God, but there isn’t just one divine person.”

**(p.297)** In view of these worries, we might try “decoupling” the metaphysical picture of the Godhead Swinburne offers from the semantic claim that “God” has one meaning in (2) and another meaning in (3). Holding that picture fixed, we cannot say that “God” means “(a) divine individual” in both (2) and (3), lest (3) come out false. We could say that “God” means “the divine collective” in both (2) and (3). But this calls into question the truth of (2). If the Father is a divine individual, and God is the divine collective, it's not clear in what sense if any it can be true that the former is the latter.

Let us suppose, though, that “God” is ambiguous between “divine individual” and “divine collective.” Then there is no obvious reason to suppose that (1)–(3) are inconsistent. It is not clear to what extent this helps us defend the consistency of the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity. For, as various philosophers have argued, it may be that the “Swinburnean” reading of (1)–(3), though (internally) consistent, concedes too much to tritheism to be consistent with the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity.

Why might one suspect it does? Well, if the ordinary English term “God” is ambiguous between “divine individual” and “divine collective,” then it is not false, but true on one reading, and false on another, that there are three Gods. It might even be true on a very natural reading—worse, on the most natural reading—that there are three Gods.

After all, by Swinburne's lights, it is the divine individuals, rather than the divine collective, that “to speak strictly…have the divine properties of omnipotence, omniscience, etc.” I imagine Swinburne would not consider the existence of a true and natural reading of “there are three Gods” overly disturbing; otherwise he would not have written: “there are three and only three Gods,” adding that this formulation avoids “traditional terminology.”[4] But surely most defenders of orthodoxy would be unhappy to admit that “there are three Gods” is perfectly fine, as long as it is properly understood, or to say that “it depends (on what you mean by ‘God’)” is a perfectly good answer to the question, “is there just one God, or more than one?” Perhaps this is because most defenders of orthodoxy are confused about what orthodoxy commits them to; but this would need to be made out. Swinburne appears to think that unless “there are three Gods” is perfectly fine, as long as it is properly understood, and “it depends” is a perfectly good answer to the question, “is there just one God, or more than one?” then the doctrine of the Trinity is self-contradictory. But the anti-Trinitarian will say that this last claim is perfectly compatible with the idea that defenders of orthodoxy are right in thinking that orthodoxy commits them to saying that there is no way of understanding “there are three Gods” on which that statement is perfectly fine, and orthodoxy commits them to saying that “it depends” is not a perfectly good answer to the question, “is there just one God, or more than one?” In any case, as we shall see, it is not evident that the doctrine of the Trinity is self-contradictory unless “there are three Gods” is fine, properly understood, and “it **(p.298)** depends” is a good answer to the question “is there just one God, or more than one?”

I don’t mean to assert categorically that the Swinburnean approach cannot give us a consistent reading of (1)–(3), or a reading of (1)–(3) that is consistent with the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity. But I do think there are enough worries about the Swinburnean approach to make it worth our while to consider alternatives.

## III

Call the thesis that

(i) an identity statement of the form *x and y are the same K* is logically equivalent to—can be "factored into"—*x* is a K, y is a K, and *x = y*, and
(ii) a "difference statement" of the form *x and y are different Ks* is logically equivalent to—can be factored into—*x is a K*, *y is a K*, and *x ≠ y*

the *factorability thesis for identity and difference*—the *factorability thesis*, for short. Call the thesis that, for the right values of *x*, *y*, *K*, and *K** it is or at least could be the case that both the identity statement *x and y are the same K*, and the difference statement *x and y are different K*s* are true, the*compatibility thesis.* Given that manifest inconsistency of *x = y* with *x ≠ y*, it is clear that the factorability thesis and the compatibility thesis are mutually exclusive.

For Peter Geach, the compatibility thesis is true, and the factorability thesis is accordingly false.[5] As he sees it, it could be that what Heraclitus bathed in today is the same river as what Heraclitus bathed in yesterday, even though what Heraclitus bathed in today is different water from what Heraclitus bathed in yesterday. It could be that the statue you made this year is the same piece of bronze as the statue you made five years ago (and subsequently melted down), even though the statue you made this year is not the same work of art as the statue you made five years ago. It could also be that the person I talked to today is the same official as the person I talked to yesterday, even though the person I talked to today is a different man from the person I talked to yesterday. It could be (and indeed is the case) that "cat" and "cat" are the same word-type, even though "cat" and "cat" are different word-tokens.[6] So Geach would respond to the argument against the consistency of (1)-(3) set out above as follows:

Because the factorability thesis is false, we are not entitled to move from the inconsistency of (a) with (b) to the inconsistency of the identity statement (2″). Because the compatibility thesis is true, there is no obvious reason to suppose that the identity statement (2″) is incompatible with the difference statement (1). **(p.299)** Hence there is no obvious reason to suppose that (2) is incompatible with either (1) or (3), or to suppose that (1)–(3) are inconsistent.

For unoriginal reasons, I don't think this sort of "Geachian" defense of the consistency of (1)–(3) is successful. It seems to be a necessary truth that if Hesperus and Phosphorus are the same planet, and Hesperus is hot, and Phosphorus is uninhabitable, then one and the same planet is both hot and uninhabitable. More generally, it seems to be a necessary truth that:

(A) If *x* and *y* are the same *K*, and *x* is *F* and *y* is *G*, then one and the same

*K* is both *F* and *G*.

It is also a necessary truth that if Venus and Mars are different planets, then Venus is the same planet as Venus, and Mars is not the same planet as Venus. More generally, it is a necessary truth that

(B) If *x* and *y* are different *K**s, then *x* is the same *K** as *x*, and *y* is not the same *K** as *x*.

Putting (A) and (B) together, we may conclude that

(C) If *x* and *y* are the same *K*, and *x*and *y* are different *K***s*, then one and the same *K* both is and is not the same *K** as y.

Moreover, the consequent of (C) seems necessarily false: how could one and the same planet (say) both be and not be the same celestial body (say) as anything? If, however, (C) is a necessarily true conditional with a necessarily false consequent, the antecedent of (C) must be necessarily false. That is, it must be impossible for *x* and *y* to be the same *K* and different *K**s. In other words, the compatibility thesis is false.

Here someone might object: whatever exactly is wrong with the argument just sketched, there must be*something* wrong with it. For it is clear from the examples given above that some statements of the form *x and y are the same K but x and y are different K*s* are or at least could be true. Isn't that enough to show that the compatibility thesis is true, and the factorability thesis is false?

No. As John Perry has pointed out, (given the right *demonstrata)* it will be true that this desk and this table are the same color, but this desk and this table are different shapes.[7] So, for the right values of *x, y, K*, and *K** (*x* = this table, *y* = this chair, *K*= color, *K** = shape), it will be true that *x* and *y* are the same*K* and *x* and *y* are different *K**s. But this is perfectly compatible with the factorability thesis (as even the opponents of that thesis will concede). The compatibility thesis says, and the factorability thesis excludes, that it is at least possible that: *x* and *y* can be identified as the same *K*, even though they can be distinguished as different *K**s. But, inasmuch as *this desk and this table are the same color* is just another way of saying *this desk and this table have the same color, this desk and this table are the same color* doesn't identify this desk and this table as the same color (in the way that, say, *roundness and circularity are the same shape* identifies roundness and circularity as the same shape). And, inasmuch as *this desk and this table are different shapes* is equivalent to *this desk and this table*

*have different shapes*, it doesn't distinguish this desk and this table as different shapes (in the way that, say,**(p.300)** *roundness and squareness are different shapes* distinguishes roundness and squareness as different shapes). So the fact that (for the right *demonstrata)* it is true that this desk and this table are the same color, but this desk and this table are different shapes, does not favor the compatibility thesis over the factorability thesis.

Generalizing this point, a statement of the form *x and y are the same K, but x and y are different K*s*will be an instance of the compatibility thesis (and a counterexample to the factorability thesis) only if (a) it is (strictly and literally) true or at least possibly true, and (b) it identifies *x* and *y* as the same *K*, and distinguishes *x* and *y* as different *K**s. Hence a statement of the form *x and y* are the same K but *x*and *y* are different *K*s* will not raise any problems for the "incompatibilist" (that is, the denier of the compatibility thesis) as long as she can either give a good account of why the statement is not (strictly and literally) true or at least possibly true, or give a good account of why the statement does not (on any of its true readings) both identify *x* and *y* as the same *K* and distinguish *x* and *y* as different *K**s. In the case of all the alleged instances of the compatibility thesis mentioned above—and in the case of any other alleged instance of the compatibility thesis—it seems that the incompatibilist is in a position to do at least one of those things. Because the point has been argued cogently and in great detail by David Wiggins,[8] I shall not add my arguments to his.

In sum: although various philosophers have defended the consistency of (1)–(3) by invoking what we might call the sortal-relativity of identity, the latter seems no less problematic than the former. In what follows, I shall consider a variety of strategies for defending the consistency of (1)–(3) that do not presuppose that identity is sortal-relative.

## IV

Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea defend the consistency of the doctrine of the Trinity by appeal to (what they take to be) the Aristotelian idea that there is a kind of numerical sameness that implies neither identity nor indiscernibility.[9] They motivate the idea that things can be numerically the same Kwithout being "strictly identical" or indiscernible as follows: it is initially plausible that there are never two material objects in (exactly) the same place at (exactly) the same time. If, however, a bronze statue occupies (that is, completely fills and does not extend beyond) a region of space R, then there is something occupying R that

could survive being radically reshaped (the bit of bronze that constitutes the statue), and there is something occupying R that could not survive being radically reshaped (the statue constituted by the bit of bronze). The something that could survive radical reshaping (the bit of bronze) cannot be strictly identical to or indiscernible **(p.301)** from the something that could not (the statue). If, however, we recognize that things can be numerically the same *K* (in this case, numerically the same material object), even if they are not strictly identical to or indiscernible from each other, we can say that the bit of bronze and the statue are the very same material object— the one and only material object occupying *R* at that time. By accepting numerical sameness without (strict) identity, we can accept all of the following (plausible) claims: (a) at most one material object occupies any given region of space at any given time; (b) strict identity implies indiscernibility; and (c) when a material substance occupies a given region of space at a given time, the material substance that occupies that region of space at the time is typically discernible from the matter that constitutes the material substance that occupies that space at that time.

Drawing on Aristotle, Brower and Rea suggest that we can think of material substance as "compounds" of matter and form—hylomorphic compounds, or as I shall call them for brevity, *hylomorphs*. As Brower and Rea see it, material objects—e.g. a statue and the bit of bronze constituting it—are numerically the same material object if they have the same matter (for brevity, are *co-materiate*) whether or not they have the same form; material objects are strictly identical if they have the same matter and the same form. When we count how many material objects there are in a place at a time, we don't count "by identity" but rather "by co-materiation" (if this material object and that material object are co-materiate, they are counted as one and the same material object; if this material object and that material object are not co-materiate, they are counted as two different material objects). On the other hand, Brower and Rea suggest, when we count how many hylomorphs there are in a place at a time, we count by strict identity: if and only if this hylomorph and that hylomorph are identical form—matter compounds, they are counted as one and the same hylomorph. Also, Brower and Rea suggest, when we count how many individuals, or things, or beings there are in a place at a time, we count by strict identity. So when a bronze statue occupies a region of space, only one material object occupies that region of space, even though two hylomorphs, and two individuals, or things, or beings, occupy it. That is because it is as it were easier for things to be the same material object than it is for things to be the same hylomorph, or individual, thing, or being.

Brower and Rea go on to say that we can conceive of the persons of the Trinity as (something like) hylomorphs, having the divine essence as their "matter," and a distinctive Trinitarian property (*being the Father, being the Son*, or *being the Holy Spirit*) as their "form." If we do this, we can say that we count divine persons ("divine hylomorphs," so to speak) in much the way we count ordinary hylomorphs: this divine person and that divine person are one and the same person if and only if this divine person and that divine person are both co-materiate and "co-formate," which implies, and is implied by, their being strictly identical and indiscernible. And we can say that we count Gods in much the way we count material objects: this God and that God are one and the same God if and only this God and that God are co-materiate. So, in the same way that the statue and the bit of bronze constituting it can be the same material object, but different (ordinary) hylomorphs, God the Father and God the Son can be the same God, but different **(p.302)** persons (and different "divine hylomorphs"). (Is this just Geach reformulated? No. Geach denies that there is such a thing as absolute identity or non-identity; hence he denies that *the Father and the Son are different persons* is logically equivalent to *the Father is a person, the Son is a person, and the Father and the Son are not strictly identical.* Brower and Rea accept this last equivalence.)

Given the assumption that the three divine persons are "co-materiate but not co-formate," and the assumption that we count divine persons by identity, and count Gods by co-materiation, we may conclude that there are three divine persons, but only one God. Moreover, we may conclude that each divine person is numerically the same God as the one and only God there is. So we can say that our original Trinitarian statements (1)–(3) are equivalent to:

> (1∼) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three numerically different persons.
> (2∼) The Father is numerically the same God as God, the Son is numerically the same God as God, and the Holy Spirit is numerically the same God as God.
> (3∼) There is only one God (equivalently: there is a God, and every God there is is numerically the same as that God).

(Brower and Rea might well want to replace (2∼) with something rather stronger, involving numerical identity, but for our purposes (2∼) will be strong enough).

And the anti-Trinitarian argument set out earlier fails for this reason: the

argument assumes that if the Father and the Son are the same God, then the Father = the Son (that is, is strictly identical to—and indiscernible from— the Son). But this assumption is mistaken if the Father and the Son are the same God (numerically the same God), in virtue of being co-materiate, in spite of being non-identical and discernible (inasmuch as they are not co-formate).

For Brower and Rea, *a* and *b* can be numerically the same *K*—one and the same *K* (material object, God)—even though *a* and *b* are discernible, and even though *a* and *b* are different *K***s* (things, hylomorphic compounds, divine persons). For example, a bronze statue and the bit of bronze constituting it, in spite of being discernible from each other (e.g. with respect to their persistence conditions), and thus distinct from each other, are nevertheless one and the same material object. Is this genuinely possible?

It seems to me that any conditional of the form

> (i) If there are two *Fs*, and both of those Fs are Gs, then there are two Gs

is necessarily true. (For example, if there are two cats in the room, and both of those cats in the room are animals in the room, then there are two animals in the room.) If, however, any conditional of that form is necessarily true, then any conjunction of the form

> (ii) *a* and *b* are (two) different individuals, but one and the same material object

is necessarily false. If this is not immediately clear: suppose that *a* and *b* are (two) different individuals, but one and the same material object. Since *a* and *b* are two different individuals, there are two individuals identical either to *a* or to *b*. **(p.303)** Moreover, given that *a* and *b* are one and the same material object, and so are both material objects, both of the individuals identical either to *a* or to *b* are material objects identical either to *a* or to *b*. (Since *a* is a material object, and *a* is identical either to *a*or to *b*, *a* is a material object identical either to *a* or to *b*; and likewise for *b*.) So where *F is an individual identical either to a or to b*, and *G is a material object identical either to a or to b,* the (conjunctive) antecedent of (i) (there are two Fs, both of which are Gs) is satisfied. But—on the assumption that *a* and*b* are the same material object—the consequent of (ii) (there are two Gs) is not satisfied. After all, if there were two material objects identical either to *a* or to *b*, then *a* and *b* would be two different material objects, rather than one and the same material object. (Compare: if there are two planets identical to either Mars or Venus, then Mars and Venus are two different planets,

rather than one and the same planet). So if some instance of (ii) is or could be true, then some instance of (i) is or could be false; equivalently, if every instance of (i) is necessarily true, no instance of (ii) could be true. The same argument shows that if every instance of

(i′) If every *F* is a *G*, there are at least as many *G*s as there are *F*s

is necessarily true, then no instance of (ii) could be true. (Assume that *a* and *b* are two different individuals, but one and the same material object. Then everything which is an individual identical either to a or to b will be a material object identical either to *a* or *b*; nevertheless there will be fewer material objects identical either to *a* or to *b* than there are individuals identical either to *a* or to *b*.)

Do these considerations constitute a good argument against the claim that (ii) could have true instances? Since I think that (i) and (i’) are necessary truths, I am inclined to think so. But here someone might say (indeed, someone has (more or less) said):

> An argument that moves from the (alleged) necessary truth of every instance of (i) (or (i’)) to the (alleged) necessary falsity of every instance of (ii) is not a good argument against the claim (ii) has possibly true instances. That is because such an argument simply presupposes the denial of the claim that (ii) has possibly true instances. Absent such a presupposition, there is no reason to think that every instance of (i) (or (i′)) is necessarily true, or even true. Of course, it might be that every instance of (i) (or (i′)) is necessarily true; and there might be independent reasons—reasons that do not beg the question at issue—for thinking that every instance of (i) (or (i’)) is necessarily true. But the argument under consideration doesn’t provide us with any such reasons, and accordingly is not a good argument.

These considerations raise delicate issues about what a good argument is. I think that every instance of (i), and every instance of (i′) is a necessary truth. I don’t have this view on the basis of a subtle logical argument. I have it because it seems (to me) evidently true. It seems (to me) evidently true that if there are more individuals than there are material objects, then not every individual is a material object, and I’m inclined to think that no one uncorrupted by philosophy would doubt that it's true. That said, I’m not claiming that any proponent of the Brower—Rea account of numerical sameness, once she reflects on the argument **(p.304)** under consideration, will grant that every instance of (i) (or of (i′)) is necessarily true, and abandon that account forthwith. Proponents of the Brower

—Rea account may well say that it is far from evident that all instances of (i) or (i’) are necessarily true, and that to suppose they are is to beg the question against their account.

Why is it far from evident that every instance of (i) (or every instance of (i′)) is a necessary truth? Brower and Rea would say something like this:

> Pre-theoretically, we find each of these claims plausible: (a) a bronze statue and the bit of bronze that statue is made of are discernible with respect to various properties (e.g. modal ones); (b) discernible things are never identical; (c) a bronze statue and the bronze that statue is made of are both material objects; and (d) different material objects are never co-materiate or co-located. (a) and (b) jointly imply that the bronze statue and the bit of bronze it is made of are different things (beings, individuals); (c) and (d) jointly imply that a bronze statue and the bronze that statue is made of are the same material object. Since (a)-(d) are all pre-theoretically plausible, and jointly imply that some instances of (i) and (i′) are possibly false, it is not after all evident that all instances of those principles are necessarily true.

Whether we pre-theoretically incline to the view that different material objects are never co-materiate or co-located is, I think, a more complicated question than it might appear. True, we sometimes answer “how many” questions in the way we would if we thought that different material objects are never co-materiate or co-located. But it's not clear just what to make of that, as I hope the following analogy will bring out.

Suppose that it is five miles by the Thames towpath from Teddington Lock to Hampton Court Palace. How many half-mile stretches of towpath are there between Teddington Lock and Hampton Court Palace? I asked my undergraduates this question, and (as I had thought they would) all of them answered “ten.” This answer is the answer that someone would give, if he or she believed that different half-mile towpath stretches never “overlapped.” Nevertheless, my undergraduates don’t really believe that different half-mile towpath stretches never overlap. They freely acknowledge that if twenty people were asked what their favorite half-mile towpath stretch between Teddington Lock and Hampton Court Palace was, they might specify twenty different stretches, even though of course there aren’t twenty non-overlapping half-mile towpath stretches between Teddington Lock and Hampton Court Palace. What is going on here? If you ask undergraduates whether there are eleven or more half-

mile towpath-stretches in the space occupied by the (five-mile) towpath between Teddington Lock and Hampton Court Palace, they'll typically answer, "no." But I'm inclined to think that the belief triggering this answer is not the belief that there are only ten half-mile towpath-stretches in the relevant space, but rather the belief that there are only ten "disjoint" (completely non-overlapping) towpath-stretches in the relevant space.

Suppose you ask a philosophically uncorrupted (but geometrically informed and articulate) person whether nine or more cube-shaped material objects can fit into a 2 meter×2 meter×2 meter region of space, assuming that each cube-shaped material object has a volume of at least 1 meter×1 meter×1 meter. **(p.305)** The person is likely to answer, "no; eight 1×1×1 cube-shaped material objects will fit into a 2×2×2 space, but no more. So if all of the cube-shaped material objects in question are at least 1×1×1 in volume, and there are nine or more of them, they won't all fit in the 2×2×2 space." That's more or less what the person will say; but again, does she really believe it? Suppose you have eight disjoint cube-shaped material objects stuck together in such a way as to constitute a 2×2×2 cube-shaped material object that overlaps with each of the 1×1×1 cube-shaped material objects. In that case, nine cube-shaped material objects (the eight little cubes, and the big cube they jointly compose) will fit into the 2×2×2 space. When our geometrically informed person gave a negative answer to our question, she never meant to exclude this possibility: the belief triggering her negative answer was not the belief that nine or more cube-shaped material objects, each of which is at least 1×1×1, cannot fit into a 2×2×2 space, but rather the belief that nine or more cube-shaped material objects, any one of which is disjoint from any other, and each of which is at least 1×1×1, cannot fit into a 2×2×2 space.

Now suppose you ask a philosophically uncorrupted person whether two or more material objects can (simultaneously) fit perfectly into—that is, fit into and completely fill—a given region of space. She may well say "no." Once again, though, it may be that the belief triggering this answer is not the belief that two or more material objects cannot fit perfectly into a given region of space, but rather the belief that two or more material objects, any one of which is disjoint from any other, cannot (simultaneously) fit perfectly into a given region of space. (A bit of evidence in favor of this hypothesis: when I teach my undergraduates about criteria of identity for material objects, I naturally discuss the view that you can't have two different material things in the same place at the same time. When the undergraduates cite this principle in their papers, they

not infrequently (mis-)cite it as the principle that you can't have two *separate* material things in the same place at the same time.)

Here a defender of the Brower—Rea account might respond:

> Agreed, in some contexts, we are blind to the existence of pairs of distinct, but partly overlapping towpath-stretches. However, when the existence of such pairs is brought to our attention, we have no difficulty acknowledging it. Similarly, although we are sometimes blind to the existence of pairs of distinct, but partly overlapping material objects, when it is brought to our attention, we have no difficulty acknowledging it. That said, we will not and should not acknowledge the existence of pairs of distinct, but *completely* overlapping towpath-stretches: if "two" stretches of towpath completely overlap, they are the same stretch of towpath. In exactly the same way, what we will not or at any rate should not acknowledge is the existence of pairs of distinct, but *completely* overlapping material objects: if "two" material objects completely overlap, they are the same material object. It is very anti-commonsensical to suppose otherwise.

Where our (hypothetical) defender of the Brower—Rea account sees an analogy, I see a disanalogy. Suppose we ask someone what her favorite stretches of towpath along the river wey are. She answers, "the stretch from A to C is my **(p.306)** favorite stretch, and the stretch from B to D is my second favorite stretch." Suppose also that the person walked from A to C in broad daylight in one season, and walked from B to D at twilight in a different season, and hence does not realize that A = B and C = D. If we are aware of all this, we will tell the person that she must be confused. We'll say something like: "Given that A = B and C = D, the stretch of the Wey towpath from A to C and the stretch of the Wey towpath from B to D are one and the same stretch, and one and the same stretch can't both be your favorite stretch of Wey towpath, and be your second favorite stretch of Wey towpath."

Now suppose we ask someone what her favorite material object is. She answers: "My favorite material object is this very long thread—the one this sweater is knit from. It's a very hard-wearing thread, and over the years I've knit ever so many useful objects from it. My second favorite material object is the sweater knit from the long thread. It's very comfortable, and it kept me toasty last winter when the central heating packed up." Here, I want to say, it would not be appropriate to say: "You must be confused. The thread and the sweater are one and the same material object, and one and the same material object cannot be

both your favorite material object, and your second favorite material object."

If, however, the answer the person gave is not confused—if the thread is her favorite material object, and the sweater is her second favorite material object—then it cannot after all be that different material objects can never completely overlap, even if different stretches of towpath can never completely overlap.

Suppose, though, that I am mistaken, and pre-theoretical common sense really does incline to the view that different material objects are never co-materiate or co-located. Will we be able to conclude that principles such as *if there are more individuals than there are material objects, then not every individual is a material object* are not evident truths? I don't think so. The argument we considered in favor of such principles not being evident truths was:

Each of

(a) a bronze statue and the bit of bronze that statue is made of are discernible with respect to various properties (e.g. modal ones)
(b) discernible things are never identical
(c) a bronze statue and the bronze that statue is made of are both material objects and
(d) different material objects are never co-materiate or co-located

is pre-theoretically plausible, and (a)–(d) jointly imply the falsity of principles such as *if there are more individuals than there are material objects, then not every individual is a material object*, so such principles are not evidently false. The difficulty is that even if each of (a)–(d) is individually pre-theoretically plausible, it still might be that the conjunction of (a)–(d) is evidently false.

**(p.307)** Here is an analogy: Robert Nozick has famously argued that, inasmuch as knowledge is not closed under known implication, it can be true that

(e) I know that I'm in Ham
(f) I know that if I'm in Ham, I'm not in Venice, just dreaming I'm in Ham, and
(g) I don't know I'm not in Venice, just dreaming I'm in Ham.

Along with Carl Ginet, Stewart Cohen, David Lewis, *et multi alii* I want to say that the conjunction of (e)–(g) is evidently false—even though, like them, I am happy to admit that each conjunct has a good measure of pre-theoretical intuitive plausibility. Not being evidently false simply isn't closed under conjunction

(otherwise it wouldn’t be evidently false that *p* and *not-p* in cases where neither *p* nor *not-p* was evidently false).

Returning to (a)–(d), I want to say: if (a)+(b) and (c)+(d) are individually pre-theoretically plausible, it's clear that we can’t have them both. If we try to, we have to say things like:

> The bronze statue and the bit of bronze the statue is made of are two different things, both of which are material, but they aren’t two different material things. Or, if they are two different material things, they aren’t two different material objects.

But, as best I can tell, it's evident, even before doing philosophy, that if the bronze statue and the bit of bronze the statue is made of are different things, both of which are material, then they are different material things; and if they are different material things, then they are different material objects. The distinction between *things, each of which are material and material things*, and the distinction between *material things* and *material objects* both seem to be, as Hume would say, distinctions without a difference. That is why the philosophically uncorrupted are just as likely to say, *you can’t have two things in the same place at the same time* as they are to say *you can’t have two material objects in the same place at the same time*, and just as likely to say the *bronze statue and the bronze the statue is made of aren’t two different things* as they are to say *the bronze statue and the bronze the statue is made of aren’t two different material objects*.

One last (two-sided) worry about the Brower—Rea account of numerical sameness: Suppose that a bronze statue (which, following Brower and Rea, we may call “Athena”) and the bit of bronze the statue is made of (which I shall call “Bit”) occupy a region of space *R*. Brower and Rea (understandably) do not want to say that the material object occupying *R* is identical to Athena, rather than Bit, or identical to Bit, rather than Athena. Nor (understandably) do they want to say that the material object in *R* is a tertium quid different from both Athena and Bit. Hence they do not want to say either that the definite description “the material object occupying *R*” refers to (the individual) Athena rather than to (the individual) Bit, or that the definite description “the material object occupying *R*” refers to (the individual) Bit rather than to (the individual) Athena, or that the definite description, “the material object occupying *R*” refers to a third individual distinct from both Athena and Bit. But then what are Brower and Rea to say that **(p.308)** definite description refers to (given that it cannot refer to

both Athena and Bit, inasmuch as only proper definite descriptions refer)?

Brower and Rea say that the definite description is ambiguous between Athena and Bit. As they see it, when we say "Athena = the material object in *R*," we say something true; so in that statement, "the material object in *R*" refers to the individual Athena (and not to the individual Bit). When we say, "Bit = the material object in *R*," we again say something true; so in that statement "the material object in *R*" refers to the individual Bit (and not to the individual Athena).

I'm not sure how things are meant to work in the case of sentences such as "the material object occupying *R* is made of bronze." In any case, there is something very puzzling about the kind of ambiguity Brower and Rea invoke here. There's nothing surprising about the idea that "the bank near the Strand" is ambiguous between a branch of Barclays, and the north bank of the Thames. But that's because the sortal "bank" is ambiguous between money-banks and river-banks. By contrast, "material object" is not ambiguous between statues and bits of bronze: although we cannot say "Barclays and the north bank of the Thames are both banks" (on pain of zeugma), we can perfectly well say "Athena and Bit are both material objects" (without fear of zeugma). If, however, "material object" is not ambiguous between statues and bits, how can it be that "the material object occupying *R*" is ambiguous between Athena and Bit, in such a way that both "Athena = the material object occupying *R*" and "Bit = the material object occupying *R*" come out true?

So much for the logical side of the worry. On the theological side, Brower and Rea want to say, not just that the Father is the same God as God, but also that the Father = God (and so on for the other divine persons). (This is why I said earlier that Brower and Rea might want a stronger formulation of (2) than (2∼).) So, Brower and Rea want to say, just as Athena = the material object occupying *R* and Bit = the material object occupying *R*, even though Athena ≠ Bit, so the Father = God, and the Son = God, even though the Father ≠ the Son. Just as "the material object occupying *R*" is ambiguous between Athena and Bit, "God" is ambiguous between the Father and the Son. Setting aside the semantic question concerning the plausibility of this last ambiguity claim, I am worried about whether it doesn't come too close to tritheism to be orthodox. Out and out tritheism says that "God" is a generic term, unambiguously true of three divine individuals. The view at issue says that "God" is "ambiguous among" three divine individuals. Is that different enough from out and out tritheism to be orthodox? Mightn't orthodoxy require us to say that "God" is a term that

unambiguously applies to just one thing?

Summing up: Brower and Rea's view of counting is an interesting alternative to both the Geachian view and the standard one. For Geach, we never count by strict (indiscernibility-implying) identity, because there is no such thing. For many or most philosophers, we always count by strict (indiscernibility-implying) identity. For Brower and Rea, whether we count by strict (indiscernibility-implying) identity, or some weaker relation, such as co-materiation, depends on what kind of thing *K* we are trying to determine the number of: if we are **(p.309)** trying to ascertain how many individuals, or hylomorphs, or divine persons there are, we count by identity; if we are trying to ascertain how many material objects or Gods there are, we count by co-materiation. For the reasons adduced, I am inclined to think that Brower and Rea are right about how we count individuals, and hylomorphs, and divine persons, but not about how we count material objects and Gods. If that is so, then the Brower—Rea defense of the consistency of (1)–(3) is not successful.

## V

Brower and Rea give us a metaphysical picture of the Godhead (as constituted by materially indiscernible but formally discernible beings/persons), together with an account of how persons and Gods are counted. We could decouple the former from the problematic part of the latter—that is, from the account of how Gods are counted. But if we give up the idea that Gods are counted by co-materiation rather than identity, and hold on to the rest of the Brower—Rea picture, we'll end up with out-and-out tritheism (as opposed to the sort of quasi-tritheism Swinburne seems committed to): there will be three divine persons, three divine hylomorphs, and three Gods.

Still, there may be a sense in which we can hold on to the Brower—Rea picture of the Godhead (or at least something rather like it), even if we think that we always count by strict identity, because numerical sameness just is identity. On that picture, we have just one (bit of?) divine "matter," three divine forms, and three ("partially overlapping," materially indiscernible but formally discernible) divine hylomorphs. Suppose that, like Brower and Rea, we say that "divine person" is true of the three hylomorphs, but, unlike Brower and Rea, we say that "God" is true of the (one and only) (bit of?) "divine matter." Then, even if counting is always counting by identity, we can say that there are three persons but just one God. So we can say that both (1) and (3) come out true. What about (2)? Well, it's a familiar idea that sometimes *a is b*, rather than meaning *a* = *b*,

means *b is the matter of a*. For example, there seems to be a true reading of *that penny is a bit of coppe*. But no penny is identical to any bit of copper (bits of copper can survive reshapings that no penny can survive, etc.). The sense in which a penny is a bit of copper, it seems natural to suppose, is that some bit of copper is the matter of that penny (if you prefer, some bit of copper "materiates" or constitutes that penny). This suggests that (if we are thinking of the Godhead hylomorphically) we could take (2) to be equivalent to *the Father is (materiated by) God, the Son is (materiated by) God, and the Holy Spirit is (materiated by) God*. And we could take *the Father and the Son are the same God* to be equivalent to *the Father and the Son are (materiated by) the same God* (in much the way that *the jumper and thread are the same bit of wool* is equivalent to *the jumper and the thread are (materiated by) the same bit of wool*). If we can do this, there is no longer any obvious reason to think that (2) is inconsistent with the conjunction **(p.310)** of (1) and (3), and the anti-Trinitarian argument at issue breaks down. The core of that argument is the following: if the Father is God, and the Son is God, either the Father and the Son are different Gods, or the Father and the Son are the same God. If the Father and the Son are different Gods, (3) is false; if the Father and the Son are the same God, *the Father and the Son are different persons*—and thus (1)—is false. If, however, *the Father and the Son are the same God is equivalent to the Father and the Son are materiated by the same God*, there is no reason to think that *the Father and the Son are the same God implies the falsity of the Father and the Son are different persons*. Compare: if *the sweater and the thread are the same bit of wool is* equivalent to *the sweater and the thread are materiated by the same bit of wool*, there is no reason to think that *the sweater and the thread are the same bit of wool*implies the falsity of *the sweater and thread are different artifacts*.

## VI

Still, someone might say, it is part of any orthodox conception of the Trinity that God is not matter—not the matter of ordinary material objects, or any other more exotic ("sextessential") kind of matter. And it is part of any orthodox conception of the Trinity that the divine persons do not have matter of any kind, whether ordinary or exotic. So even if

(1∼∼) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three (different) persons.
(2∼∼) The Father is (materiated by) God, the Son is (materiated by) God, and the Holy Spirit is (materiated by) God.
(3∼∼) There is just one God.

form a consistent triad, that won't help us find a reading of (1)–(3) that is consistent with the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity.

Someone defending the consistency of the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity in the face of the anti-Trinitarian argument might insist that there is a sense (albeit extended) of "matter" in which it is perfectly proper, and perfectly compatible with orthodoxy, to say that God is matter, and that the persons of the Trinity are material beings. Alternatively, a defender of the consistency of the doctrine of the Trinity might say:

> Forget about whether it is orthodox to think of God as matter (in even an extended sense), and the persons of the Trinity as hylomorphs (in even an extended sense). It is certainly orthodox to think of God as a substance, and to think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as persons. It is also certainly orthodox to think of the persons of the Trinity as consubstantial. Consubstantiality is a relation between divine persons. But what it is for (say) the Father and the Son to stand in the consubstantiality relation to each other is for the Father and the Son to stand in a different relation (that is, a relation different from consubstantiality) to the same substance. What it is for the Father and the Son to be consubstantial is for the Father and the Son to be of the same substance—that is, for there to be a substance that the Father is of and the Son is of. Compare: what it is for the sweater **(p.311)** and the thread to be "co-materiate" is for there to be a bit of matter that the sweater is (made) of and the thread is (made) of. We could say that what it is for the sweater and the thread to be co-materiated is for there to be a bit of matter that both the thread and the sweater are "materiated" or "enmattered" by. Analogously, we could say that what it is for the Father and the Son to be consubstantial is for there to be a substance that both the Father and the Son are "substantiated" or "ensubstanced" by. To prevent possible misunderstandings: the relation of consubstantiality cannot be identified with the relation of substantiation or ensubstancement. To start with, consubstantiality is an equivalence relation, and the being-ensubstanced-by relation is not. But consubstantiality is supervenient upon the more fundamental relation of ensubstancement.
>
> Orthodoxy does not allow us to identify the persons of the Trinity with the substance they are persons of. If we supposed that each divine person was identical to the one substance they are all persons of, it would follow that there was only one divine person. But although orthodoxy does not allow us to identify the persons of the Trinity with the substance they are of, it

certainly does allow us to identify the substance the persons of the Trinity are of with the substance that is God. In other words, orthodoxy certainly does not require us to say that the existence of God involves the existence of three persons and *two* substances—the substance that each divine person is of, and the (different) substance that = God. (If anything, orthodoxy requires us to say that the existence of God involves the existence of three persons and just one substance.)

If the substance that God is = the substance that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all of, then we can say, not just that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the same substance, but also that the Father and the Son are of the substance God. So it looks as though, without apparent prejudice to orthodoxy we may suppose that (1)–(3) are equivalent to:

> (1*) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three (different) persons.
> (2*) The Father is (a person of the substance) God, the Son is (a person of the substance) God, and the Holy Spirit is (a person of the substance) God. (Equivalently: the Father is (ensubstanced by) God, the Son is (ensubstanced by) God, and the Holy Spirit is (ensubstanced by) God.
> (3*) There is just one (substance) God.

And without apparent prejudice to orthodoxy, we may suppose that *the Father and the Son are the same God* is equivalent to *the Father and the Son are (persons of) the same (substance) God*(if you prefer, *the Father and the Son are (ensubstanced by) the same God).* There is no obvious reason to think that (2*) is incompatible with the conjunction of (1) and (3). So, since (2*) is a defensible reading of (2), the anti-Trinitarian argument does not go through, because there is no way to get from the truth of *the Father and the Son are (persons ensubstanced by) the same God*to the falsity of *the Father and the Son are different persons.*

## VII

This may not be a bad time to take stock. We have set out an argument for the inconsistency of the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity, and considered five different attempts to counter it. The first (Swinburnean) counter turns on the idea that **(p.312)** “God” is ambiguous between “divine individual” and “divine collective,” and there is no inconsistency in the idea that each of the three divine

persons is a God (divine individual), even though there is just one God (divine collective). The second (Geachian) counter to the argument turns on compatibilism (the view that possibly *a* and *b* can be identified as the same *K* and distinguished as different *K**s). The third (Brower–Rea) counter turns on the idea that, because (for the right sort of kind *K*) things can be numerically the same *K* without being strictly identical or indiscernible, different persons of the Trinity can each be numerically the same God as the only God there is. The fourth counter turns on the idea that in statement (2) of the allegedly inconsistent triad, "is" means "is materiated by" or "has as its matter," and the fifth counter turns on the idea that in (2) "is" means "is ensubstanced by" or "has as its substance."

The reader who has followed me this far will not be surprised to read that I think the fifth counter is more promising than the first three. For reasons adduced, I regard the Geachian and the Brower–Rea counters as logically problematic, and the Swinburnean counter as theologically problematic, in the sense that it is not clearly a defense of the (orthodox) doctrine of the Trinity.

Assuming the fifth counter is preferable to the first three, is it also preferable to the fourth? I'm not sure we need to answer that question. If we can stretch the notion of "matter" far enough to cover God, and stretch the notion of material substance (aka hylomorph) far enough to cover the divine persons, then perhaps we can think of the fifth counter as a reformulation of the fourth counter in more traditional theological terminology. If we can't stretch the notions of "matter" and "material substance" that far, then we can think of the fifth counter as an improvement on the fourth counter—one which preserves its good points, whilst jettisoning an indefensible part of it. I have it from Michael Rea (personal communication) that Brower and Rea are not committed to the view that there is an (exotic) kind of matter in God, or that the divine persons are composed of form and an (exotic) kind of matter; they are only committed to the view that there is something (in certain respects) like matter and something (in certain respects) like form—matter composition *in divinis.* Nor are they committed to calling the relation between the thing that is like matter in God and the divine persons materiation; ensubstancement will do just as well. So we could think of the fifth counter as one that resembles the Brower-Rea counter up to a certain point, but differs from that account insofar as (i) (numerical) sameness and counting are treated classically, (ii) statements such as *the Father is identical with God*and *the Son is identical with God* come out false.

We might optimistically conclude that the fifth counter blocks the anti-

Trinitarian argument, and helps us understand how, appearances to the contrary, (1)-(3) could all be true together. If we did, a proponent of the anti-Trinitarian argument might object:

> The fifth counter doesn't in fact give us any understanding of how, appearances notwithstanding, (1)–(3) could all be true (together). Suppose that someone defended the consistency of (1)–(3) as follows: "It may look as though (1)–(3) couldn't all be true **(p.313)** (together). But they could be. This is how: there's a mystery relation *R*, and (2) is equivalent to the claim that the three divine persons bear the mystery relation *R* to the one God."
>
> This wouldn't remotely help us see how (1)–(3) could all be true (together). And it would make no difference if we introduced a name—substantiation, say, or ensubstancement—for the mystery relation. A named mystery relation is just as mysterious as an unnamed one.

I think that someone who counters the anti-Trinitarian argument in the fifth way can say *something*about the relation of ensubstancement. She can say that it neither is nor implies strict identity. She can say that it is irreflexive, asymmetric, and non-Euclidean. She can say that it resembles *being materiated by* in that it does not hold between disjoint things. Helping herself to a Trinitarian analogy suggested by Trenton Merricks, she can say that it in certain ways resembles the relation holding between multiple "centers of consciousness" and a human person with a divided mind.[10]

That said, I think that she should admit that the ensubstancement relation holding between a divine person and God is deeply mysterious—far more mysterious than, say, the relation of strict identity holding between a thing and itself, or the materiation relation holding between a material object and its matter, or the membership relation holding between an individual and the collective to which that individual belongs. So I think that someone attempting to counter the anti-Trinitarian argument should distinguish between the project of giving us an understanding of why that argument does not work, and the project of giving us an understanding of how the doctrine of the Trinity can be true. Even if the first project is feasible *in statu viatoris*, the same may not be true of the second. As I see it, it is actually an advantage of the fifth counter that (unlike, say, the Swinburnean counter) it invokes a (very, though not entirely) mysterious relation in the attempt to make room for the consistency of (2) with the conjunction of (1) and (3). For the doctrine of the Trinity is mysterious, and the heart of the mystery is that each divine person is, in a way (or in a sense of

“is”) that it is beyond our power to understand, God.

Notes:

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(1) Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 180–81.

(2) Ibid., 186.

(3) Ibid., 181.

(4) Richard Swinburne, “Could There Be More Than One God?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1988): 225–41 at 234.

(5) Peter Geach, *Reference and Generality*, emended edition (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1968), 152 *et passim*

(6) Peter Geach, “Identity,” in *Logic Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 245.

(7) John Perry, “The Same F,” *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 181–200.

(8) *Sameness and Substance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

(9) Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, “Material Constitution and the Trinity,” (Chapter 14, this volume).

(10) Trenton Merricks, “Split Brains and the Godhead,” in T. Crisp, D. Vanderlaan, and M. Davidson (eds.), *Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic publishers, 2006).

# Brower and Rea's Constitution Account of the Trinity

**Alexander R. Pruss**

Recently, Brower and Rea (see their essay in this volume, Chapter 14) have introduced a new and apparently orthodox solution to one of the problems of the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, this solution is supposed to be based on metaphysics that provides an Aristotelian solution to the problem of material constitution.

I will begin by sketching the problem and Brower and Rea's solution, with some quick objections. I will then argue for three major points. First, the solution as it stands neglects an important feature of Aristotle's account. Second, the metaphysics does not seem to work well in diachronic and interworld cases. Third, as it stands, the Brower and Rea solution is incomplete in the sense that it does not rule out views that are clearly Modalist. I shall offer a suggestion for how one can complete the view to avoid the last problem, and discuss an alternative but related approach due to Aquinas.

## The Problem and the Constitution Account

The relevant problem of the Trinity is that Christian orthodoxy includes the following claims:

(1) The Father is not the Son.
(2) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
(3) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
(4) The Father is the same God that the Son is.
(5) The Father is the same God that the Holy Spirit is.
(6) The Son is the same God that the Holy Spirit is.

These statements seem to be contradictory if the “is” in all of them is interpreted as an “is” of identity.

A family of solutions is obtained by saying that the “is” of (1)–(3) is the “is” of identity, while the “is” of (4)–(6) and of related statements like “The Father is **(p.315)** God” is not the “is” of predication (that would go in the direction of Tritheism) but instead an “is” that expresses a numerical sameness without identity (nswoi), and the “same” in (4)–(6) is also to be understood in terms of

nswoi. This nswoi needs to be not identity *simpliciter* but a numerical sameness of object strong enough that the claim that if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have nswoi, then monotheism is preserved.

A particular member of this family of solutions will then, ideally, give us an account of nswoi that makes it clear that when the "is" and "same" of (4)–(6) are understood in terms of nswoi, then (1)–(6) become mutually compatible, and moreover compatible with orthodoxy. Moreover, a necessary condition for such an account to be *complete* identical is that it make clear how the account is incompatible with Tritheism, the claim that there are three Gods, and Modalism, the claim that the Persons are to be understood in terms of distinct roles played by the same divine reality.

Brower and Rea's account of nswoi introduces the genus "numerical sameness without identity" by using Aristotelian examples. Socrates is not identical with Socrates-sitting, presumably because they have different properties: when Socrates stands up, Socrates-sitting ceases to exist, but Socrates persists. But, plainly, we want to preserve the intuition that there is only one thing where Socrates is, rather than the co-located multitude Socrates, Socrates-sitting, Socrates-snubnosed, and so on.[1] To do that, we say that Socrates and Socrates-sitting have nswoi, and use this to do justice to the claim that there is only one material object there.

What is this nswoi that Socrates and Socrates-sitting have? Well, Socrates and Socrates-sitting are distinct hylomorphic compounds. They have the same matter, but different forms. The matter and forms are not individuals. They only make sense in combination. For two hylomorphic compounds to be identical, they need to have the same matter and the same form. For them to have nswoi, they need only have the same matter.

If Socrates and Socrates-sitting were all the examples we had, then we could instead opt for a simpler solution. We could just say that Socrates and Socrates-sitting are *identical*, and then deny that Socrates-sitting ceases to exist when he stands up. Socrates-sitting (or, in better English, "the seated Socrates") will continue to exist after he stands up, but he will no longer fall under the description "Socrates-sitting."

However, we can use the same nswoi account in cases where a solution like this is implausible, and it is in cases like this that the nswoi account really comes into its **(p.316)** own. Consider the classic problem of the statue of Athena and the

lump of bronze. Here we should not identify the statue and the lump, since if we identified them, then the single thus-identified object would either fall under the persistence conditions of the statue or those of the lump or neither. If those of the statue, then we would have to say that the lump would cease to exist were it melted down, which seems false; if those of the lump, then we would have to say that the statue would continue to exist were it melted down, which likewise seems false; and if neither, then we would have even more problems. Brower and Rea's solution is to say that the statue of Athena and the lump of bronze are not identical—they are two hylo-morphic compounds of matter and form—but they have nswoi in virtue of sharing in the same matter. Their lack of identity is ensured by the difference in the form that the matter has—the form of a statue of Athena versus the form of a lump of bronze.

Now, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not have matter. However, on Brower and Rea's view, they too are hylomorphic compounds. The Father is a compound of the divine essence and of a form which I will call “his Fatherhood,” the Son is a compound of the divine essence and of a form I will call “his Sonhood,” and the Holy Spirit is a compound of the divine essence and of a form I will call “his Spirithood.” What makes (1)–(3) true is the differences between these forms. What makes (4)–(6) true is the sameness of the divine essence.

Sameness of the divine essence is a species of nswoi. Specifically, it is an essential sameness without identity. While the matter of the statue might have failed to be a statue and might have even failed to be a lump (it might have been a vapor instead), and the statue and the lump can fail to have nswoi, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit essentially have nswoi, and the divine essence essentially has the three person-constituting forms.

## Three Objections

First note that the view appears incompatible with divine simplicity, since it makes the divine persons be *compounds*. While Brower and Rea intend their view to be compatible with “the ecumenical creeds” (p. 260), perhaps they would be willing to deny that the First Vatican Council, which taught that God is altogether simple, was an ecumenical council. But this would be a serious problem for Catholics. Moreover, we will later see that divine simplicity would help them defend against a different objection. So perhaps even if they do not accept the First Vatican Council, they should worry about divine simplicity. Or, perhaps, a healthy dose of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy would help. It is not that God is a compound, but that he is *analogous* to a compound.

Second, we may object that if anything in God is a form, it is the divine essence — it is what makes God be God—and the persons seem to be what underlie the form, in that they seem to *have* the divine essence. Thus, pace Brower and Rea, the persons would if anything seem to be more like matter which is a bearer of form. And it is, after all, matter which is responsible for individuation on Aristotelian views. This **(p.317)** objection may make us somewhat suspicious of Brower and Rea's view, but analogies can be run in multiple ways, and this is not a decisive objection.

A third challenge for the view is to explain why there are only three persons in the Trinity. After all, the Father judges and forgives. Why, then, do we not have two further persons, by analogy with Socrates-sitting: the Father-judging and the Father-forgiving? One might argue that the Father-judging is a hylomorphic compound, but the form *being Father and forgiving* is not a person-constituting form.[2]This indicates one kind of incompleteness in the account as given: we need to be told what it is for a form to be person-constituting (note that it is not enough for the form to entail being a person, since*forgiving* is a property that entails being a person—only persons can forgive).

## How Aristotelian is the Account

The Aristotelian credentials of Brower and Rea's view are based on Aristotle's hylomorphism together with Aristotle's allowance that Socrates and Socrates-sitting are *one in number but not one in being*.[3]The "one in number" they take to indicate numerical sameness, and the "not one in being" they take to be a denial of identity. First let us note that Aristotle's doctrine can be read differently. On a plausible reading of Aristotle, "*x* is" is typically an incomplete expression. To be is to be an F. That Socrates and Socrates-sitting are not one in being just means that *to be Socrates* is not the same as to *be Socrates-sitting*. For what it is to *be Socrates-sitting* is just to sit while being Socrates. There is no need to attribute to Aristotle the strange doctrine that Socrates-sitting is an *entity* distinct from Socrates, though at times Aristotle does talk in ways that suggest this. If Socrates-sitting were a distinct entity, we would be hard pressed to say which category it fits into—Socrates is a substance and sitting is a "position," but what kind of a thing is a Socrates-sitting? Intuitively, it seems more plausible to say that there is just Socrates, who is sitting, and for there to be Socrates-sitting is nothing else than for there to be Socrates and for him to sit. This is not a paper of Aristotle exegesis, and quite possibly I am wrong in my reading and Brower and Rea are right on this point.

Note, though, that it may be that a response to the Father-judging and Father-forgiving objection at the end of the previous section will require something like the view I am attributing here to Aristotle—there is just the Father, and he is judging and forgiving, and so there are no additional persons due to the judging and forgiving.

But the point I now want to make will in the end be more important. I take it to be essential to Aristotle's project that it is the form that unifies the matter into a particular, and apart from a form, matter would have no particularity, and hence the identity of the matter is derivative from that of the form. The idea of the same **(p.318)** matter having two different forms is problematic, because matter only exists insofar as it is the matter of something or other which makes it have the identity it does. If we say that the lump and the statue have the same matter, the matter is apparently being treated as if it had a being independent of its form.

On my reading of Aristotle's view of the relationship between form and matter, the wood ceases to exist when the wooden statue is formed, just as there is no longer a sick man when he becomes healthy. Aristotle does seem to say just this in *Metaphysics* Z7 (1033a5–23), but more important than that is that the solution to the problem of the unity of form and matter in H6 seems to require that the matter not be a distinct actual entity, which it would run the danger of being if it had a particularity independent of the form. Admittedly, seeing matter as lacking in any identity apart from the form poses a serious problem for Aristotle's solution in the *Physics* to the problem of change—the solution is that the matter persists, but the form changes. Perhaps, though, we can understand the “matter” there not as a particular thing, but as a pattern of potentialities or even actualities (if it's not just prime matter).

At the same time Aristotle *could* perhaps admit that the same matter has two distinct forms, and indeed does if I am wrong about my reading of Socrates and Socrates-sitting, provided that one of these forms is *primary* in the sense of being the form that gives the matter its identity. Then we can say that the same matter underlies Socrates and Socrates-sitting. The matter is not being treated as independent of its form. Rather, the matter gets its identity from Socrates. It is *the matter of Socrates as such* which underlies Socrates-sitting. The matter of Socrates-sitting as such does not underlie Socrates, since there is no such thing as the matter of Socrates-sitting *as such*: the matter is defined by the form of Socrates, not by his being seated. If G is a non-primary form—if there is any such thing in Aristotle—then to have G is to have the relevant primary form *and* then to satisfy some further condition.

Now if we are to understand the Trinity on the analogy of hylomorphic compounds, we surely had better understand the forms constituting the divine persons as *co-primary*, or else there would seem to have to be a more basic triplet than that of the persons. It might be initially tempting instead to say that because the Son proceeds from the Father, we can take the Father's form as primary. But that would lead to the surely mistaken view that the Son is the Father *as satisfying some further condition*. This is a strange view. It seems to threaten Modalism—the distinction between the Son and the Father seems to consist in a difference of role, namely the role defined by the condition. Moreover, it threatens boundless multiplication of persons. For we can come up with a multitude of conditions that the Father satisfies, and even personal conditions (ones that only persons can satisfy, such as loving, knowing, judging, etc.).

But if Sonhood, Fatherhood, and Spirithood are co-primary in the relevant sense, then we lose the analogy to material hylomorphic compounds. For in these there cannot be multiple primary forms, at least on Aristotle's view. This is, as it stands, a relatively minor problem, in that (a) Brower and Rea can disagree with Aristotle as I read him, about primary forms (which is not so bad at all, since I could be misreading **(p.319)** him), and (b) they can hold that even if the analogy to material hylomorphic compounds is weakened, their account of the Trinity stands on its own.

## Sameness Over Time

Brower and Rea claim that their hylomorphic account provides a solution to the problem of material constitution. This is important to their story. For their account has implausible consequences, such as that Socrates is not Socrates-sitting in the sense of identity, and their response to the implausibilities is that all solutions to the problem of material constitution have implausibilities (p. 268).

Here I want to note that the most serious problems of material constitution are raised by thought experiments that are extended in time or that span possible worlds. If objects could exist only at one time and in one world, the only reason to suppose that there is a problem of material constitution would be worries about Socrates and Socrates-sitting, and those are not particularly serious. It is only because the same thing can exist at different times and in different worlds that we have a problem.

I shall now use a diachronic formulation. Suppose I have the statue and the

lump. I am going to gradually replace the bronze with freshly produced bronze. Then my current statue is identical with the future statue. But it does not have the same matter as the future statue. If having numerical sameness for a material object is a function of sharing the underlying matter, as the Brower and Rea account seems to say, then the current statue is not numerically the same as the future statue. But it is*identical with the future statue*. So it seems that not only do we need to swallow numerical sameness without identity, but we need to swallow identity without numerical sameness.

Thus, it is not really clear that “numerical sameness” at all deserves its name if it neither entails nor is entailed by identity. Yet deserving its name is important, since the only thing that keeps Brower and Rea's account from Tritheism is the claim that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have numerical sameness.

There is a way out of this objection, and that is to embrace four-dimensionalism. The statue then is a four-dimensional worm and so is the lump. Both are hylomorphic compounds of matter arranged in space-time. But the same problem arises between worlds. There is another world where the identical statue is made of different matter.[4] It, thus, seems to have identity without numerical sameness.

Perhaps Brower and Rea can respond that the account of numerical sameness is only meant to be intraworldly and either synchronic or four-dimensionalist. But then one of two possibilities must be true. Either numerical sameness only holds between things that exist in the same world at the same time. If so, then the **(p.320)** implausible fact that identity does not entail numerical sameness remains—what kind of a numerical sameness is it if *x* doesn’t bear it to *x*? Or, alternately, numerical sameness can hold between things that exist in different worlds or at different times, but Brower and Rea have not yet given us an account of numerical sameness that is sufficiently general for that. This is more than a plea, however, for them to complete the account to include diachronic or interworld cases. For until it is seen that the account can be thus completed, we are not, I think, in a position to know that there is a tenable notion of nswoi.

## Modalism

But now let us press the incompleteness objection. The Brower and Rea account does not exclude Modalism. Let me begin by formulating a kind of Modalism that they can exclude, and then show how a modified version is not excluded. On this paradigmatic Modalism, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished

by different roles. The Father is God-creating, the Son is God-redeeming, and the Holy Spirit is God-sanctifying.[5] This is plainly and recognizably a Modalist view.

Now, I do not have a precise characterization of what counts as a Modalist view. My own intuitions are driven by taking the above as a paradigm case. But one sufficient condition for a view to count as Modalist is that we can construct a close parallel in the case of a single human being. Thus, we can imagine Homer creating (the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), redeeming (a friend from slavery), and sanctifying (a utensil used ritually; this is a different but related sense of "sanctify" from the divine case). But Homer-creating, Homer-redeeming, and Homer-sanctifying are by no stretch of the imagination at all like*three* persons—they are one person, exhibiting three modes of operation.

Another reason that the God-creating, God-redeeming, and God-sanctifying account is not an orthodox account of Trinity is that the account just as much makes God be an infinity of persons. After all, we can add God-revealing, God-rewarding, God-punishing, and so on.

But now note that the above Modalist view can be phrased in terms of nswoi. Socrates-sitting and Socrates-reading are hylomorphic compounds that are not identical but have nswoi. By the same token, it would seem, God-creating, God-redeeming, and God-sanctifying are not identical but have nswoi. Indeed, it is hard to see how Brower and Rea can refuse to countenance the hylomorphic compounds "God-creating," "God-redeeming," and "God-sanctifying," if they countenance "Socrates-sitting." Perhaps a strong doctrine of divine simplicity could force one to identify all these, but it is not clear that a hylomorphic view, introducing composition of essence and form in God, is compatible with divine **(p.321)** simplicity. For instance, if one accepts divine simplicity, then it seems one will identify together all the properties that the divine essence has, and in particular it seems one will identify the personhood-constituting forms, since Brower and Rea identify forms with (immanent, trope-like) properties (p. 267).

Now, the view that the persons of the Trinity are like God-creating, God-redeeming, and God-sanctifying is a Modalist view. Brower and Rea tell us next to nothing about what the forms of Fatherhood, Sonhood, and Spirithood are, and so it may seem that they do not exclude the option that these forms just are the forms of *divinely creating*, *divinely redeeming*, and *divinely sanctifying*. And if they do not exclude this, then the Brower and Rea account does not exclude Modalism, which it should if it is to be complete.

But at this point I am being unfair. For Brower and Rea note one crucial disanalogy between the case of material objects and of God. In the case of material objects, at least some of the forms are accidental forms. Socrates is only accidentally sitting. Thus, Brower and Rea insist that it is not an accidental property of the divine essence that it has the person-constituting forms it does. But it is an accidental property of God that he creates, redeems, and sanctifies. After all, God might have chosen not to create, in which case neither would he have anything to redeem or sanctify.

But it is easy to fix this defect in my example. Just choose any triplet of properties that God has essentially, such as *knowing*, *loving* (himself, at least), and *choosing* (whether to create or not, say). Or, to stick closer to the above formulation, choose the triplet *capable of creating, capable of redeeming, and capable of sanctifying*. Now the forms seem to be essential: God cannot but know, be known, love, and be capable of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Yet this is still an objectionable Modalism. A Modalist view is no less objectionable if the roles are ones that God cannot lack.

If, on the other hand, one does not think that defining the persons in terms of a triplet like *capable of creating, capable of redeeming, and capable of sanctifying* yields Modalism, go back to the Homer case. Homer essentially has the properties of possibly creating, possibly redeeming, and possibly sanctifying (the modality is not temporalized: x is possibly creating provided that there is some world w and time t such that x is creating at t at w). But this does not make him three persons. If it did, he would also be four persons, since he possibly rewards, and five because he possibly punishes, and so on. The same could be said about God, who is also capable of rewarding, punishing, knowing, and so on.

I am not claiming that Brower and Rea have embraced Modalism. I am merely claiming that their view fails to exclude it.

## A Final Suggestion

Suppose, however, we attend to the idea of primary form, the form that makes a thing be what it is, which I introduced above (p. 318). For Aristotle, Socrates' **(p.322)** primary form is *humanity*. This is a form he has *essentially*, not just in the modern modal sense that is opposed to contingency (this seems to be the sense that Brower and Rea are using it in, since they expressly introduce "essential" in opposition to contingency on p. 277), but in a deeper Aristotelian sense.[6] Remember, after all, the Aristotelian category of the necessary accident.

The classic example is risibility. Necessarily all humans have a capacity for laughter, or so we are told, but this capacity for laughter is a consequence of the essence, rather than being a part of the essence.

Suppose we read Brower and Rea's insistence on the personhood-constituting forms being essential not just in the modal sense, which is probably what Brower and Rea intend, but in the deeper Aristotelian sense. In that case, the examples I previously gave may fail. For that God knows, loves, and chooses may be "essential" in the modern sense of its being impossible for God to fail to know, love, or choose, but perhaps is not essential in the Aristotelian sense—these properties of God *follow* from the essence but are not in the essence. In fact, with Aquinas, we might even say that the essence of God is unknowable, and, if so, it will be impossible to manufacture counterexamples of the sort I did.

This, by itself, is not going to rule out Modalism. For even if the particular Modalist examples I gave in the last section are ruled out, a complete account would have to make clear why *all* such Modalist examples are ruled out, and, more importantly, why it is that the Brower and Rea story is not *itself* a Modalist story. We have seen that *some* stories that involve the same divine essence and three different forms are Modalist ones. There has to be something special about the forms Fatherhood, Sonhood, and Spirithood that ensures that the Brower and Rea story not be a Modalist one. But they have not told us what that something special is.

I want to offer a suggestion of how one might do this, but the suggestion will decrease the analogy to the material world. Suppose we accept that ordinary hylomorphic compounds can have only primary form, and consider the synchronic (or four-dimensionalist) intraworldly case. We can then say two different things about Socrates and Socrates-sitting. We can say that (i) they have the numerically same matter and (ii) they have the numerically same individual primary form (here the forms need to be individual, like tropes, rather than Platonic "one over many" Forms). Call these two relations between Socrates and Socrates-sitting "sameness$_{i}$" and "sameness$_{ii}$," respectively. Plausibly, it is a necessary truth that if *x* and *y* are ordinary material objects (this may be partly definitional of "ordinary"!) at the same time in the same world (or perhaps just in the same world if four-dimensionalism holds), then *x* is the same$_{i}$ as *y* if and only if *x* is the same$_{ii}$ as *y*. Nonetheless, "sameness$_{i}$" and "sameness$_{ii}$" are distinct relations, even if coextensive for ordinary material objects.[7]

**(p.323)** Now let us suppose that the "is" in statements like "The Father is not the Son" expresses something at least analogous to one of these samenesses, while the "is" in statements like "The Father is God" or "The Father is the same God that the Son is" expresses something at least analogous to the other kind of sameness (as does "same" in the latter sentence). Then we may have a resolution of the apparent conflict posed by (1)–(6). For even though the relations *sameness* $_{i}$ and *sameness* $_{ii}$ are coextensive for ordinary material objects, they may be analogous to relations that in the case of God are not simply coextensive (they may be coextensive$_{i}$ or maybe coextensive$_{ii}$, if we similarly disambiguate "coextensive"). We thus have two accounts here: one that compares the "is" in "The Father is God" to sameness$_{i}$ and the "is" in "The Father is the same God that the Son is" to sameness$_{ii}$, and the other that switches the comparisons about.

Both accounts can defend against Modalism or Tritheism. Suppose that "The Father is God" uses an "is" analogous to sameness$_{a}$ (where "a" is "i" or "ii," respectively) and "The Father is the same God as the Son is" uses an "is" analogous to sameness$_{b}$ (where "b" is "ii" or "i," respectively) and "same" is understood in terms of sameness$_{b}$. Then the divine persons are analogous to being three$_{a}$ (we can define counting in terms of sameness relations[8]), since the divine persons are analogous to Peter, Paul, and John who are three$_{a}$ (they are also three$_{b}$, but that is beside the point here). Moreover, no ordinary human being fulfilling multiple roles counts as three$_{a}$ (or three$_{b}$ for that matter). Thus there is genuine threeness in the Trinity and Modalism is defended against by means of a disanalogy with paradigm cases of multiplicity of roles. At the same time, the divine persons are analogous to being one$_{b}$, in a sense in which Socrates is one$_{b}$ while Peter, Paul, and John are three$_{b}$. What the content of this analogy is depends on whether b = i or b = ii. Furthermore, neither sameness$_{a}$ nor sameness$_{b}$ is a matter of agreement of will or anything like that—both of these are metaphysical relations, and both of them arise when we realize that our affirmations of "sameness" are ambiguous for hylomorphic compounds.

The Brower and Rea account could, then, be modified to take the "is" in "The Father is not the Son" (and parallels) to express something analogous to sameness$_{ii}$ (i.e., analogous to the sameness that Socrates and Socrates-sitting have in virtue of numerical sameness of *primary* form[9]) and the "is" in "The Father is God" (and parallels) to express something analogous to sameness$_{i}$ (i.e.,

analogous to the numerical sameness of matter).

**(p.324)** But one could also take the opposite analogy. One could take the "is" in "The Father is not the Son" as analogous to $\text{sameness}_{\text{i}}$, and the "is" in "The Father is God" as analogous to $\text{sameness}_{\text{ii}}$. If one does that, then one in fact basically gets Aquinas' account of the Trinity.

Aquinas' account, as I read his discussion in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* was this. In creatures, we can look at identity in two different ways. There is identity of *underlying individual*(hypostasis), which we can understand in terms of matter in the case of material individuals, but which in fact is a more general concept than mere identity of matter since it can also be applied to angels, which have no matter. This kind of identity is, basically, a generalization of what I called "$\text{sameness}_{\text{i}}$." And then there is identity of *substantial form* (essence, *ousia*). For creatures, these two coincide. But in God they come apart. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct underlying individuals (*hypostases*) but one essence (*ousia*).

One can also modify these accounts, and instead of saying that the Father stands to the Son in a relation*analogous* to $\text{sameness}_{\text{a}}$ (where "a" is "i" or "ii"), one generalizes the relation "$\text{sameness}_{\text{a}}$" to a relation that applies to the Father and the Son *literally*. Perhaps to do that one says that there are two more general relations, call them "$\text{Sameness}_{\text{i}}$" and "$\text{Sameness}_{\text{ii}}$," of which the respective relations "$\text{sameness}_{\text{i}}$" and "$\text{sameness}_{\text{ii}}$" for ordinary material objects were special cases. I prefer not to do this, because I like the idea that our language about God is either entirely or almost entirely analogical.

I think Aquinas' account is superior to the fixed-up version of the account of Brower and Rea, since Aquinas' account does justice to the idea that the primary form of Socrates, *his humanity*, is analogous to *divinity*, rather than to Fatherhood, Sonhood, or Spirithood.

It is interesting that we now have three accounts of the Trinity sharing the same basic method, which is to distinguish two ways of being the same: one way which the persons do not have and one which they do have. The first is the original Brower and Rea account. The second is my modified version of their account involving the notion of primary form, as given in this section. The third is Aquinas' version which uses a very similar analogy, but with the terms of analogy reversed. The last two come in analogical and non-analogical variants.

All of these accounts have something in common with relative identity accounts of the Trinity, on which "identity" and "distinctness" need a specifying kind, so that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three *persons* but one God, in that all four accounts involve a distinction between kinds of sameness.

However, there are some relevant distinctions. The relative identity account of the Trinity as well as the accounts of this section involving $\text{sameness}_{\text{i}}$ and $\text{sameness}_{\text{ii}}$ affirm that a more specified relation is more ontologically primitive than identity. The relative identity theorist, however, has more than two identitylike relations (*being the same dog, being the same statue, being the same lump, being the same person, etc*.) while these accounts have only two identity-like relations each. The relative identity account helps with diachronic and interworld material constitution problems, while more work would be needed to see if these two **(p.325)** accounts can at all help with them. However, Brower and Rea (p. 266) have argued that the relative identity account of the Trinity has its own problems. (Indeed, thinking about *sameness qua person versus sameness qua official* suggests that there will be a problem with Modalism, unless something can show how being the same *qua* person differs from being the same *qua* official.)

On the other hand, the original Brower and Rea account of the Trinity faces a difficulty with ruling out Modalism, but has the advantage over the two I offered in this section that it is easier to get the concept of their two identity-like relations (identity and nswoi) by attending to ordinary material hylomorphic individuals, since their two relations do *not* coincide in ordinary cases. Unfortunately, this advantage appears to be linked to the difficulty. This is perhaps unsurprising. In fact, I want to offer a rough heuristic: accounts of the Trinity that have a very tight analogy between the divine case and ordinary cases are more likely to have theological difficulties. For there is nothing else like the Trinity. I think the two accounts I offered in this section are more likely to do justice to this than the original Brower and Rea account is. And of these two, Aquinas' account has the advantage of being already worked out in a great deal of detail in the *Prima Pars*, and correctly analogizing the divine essence to the natures of ordinary hylomorphic compounds, rather than to their matter.[10]

Notes:

(1) Here's one reason to try to preserve the intuition. It seems that each of Socrates, Socrates-sitting, Socrates-snubnosed, etc. is a person. If there is more than one thing there, then it seems there is more than one person there. Indeed,

the number of properties Socrates has is presumably infinite—think of the properties *being less than three meters tall, being less than four meters tall*, and so on. So there would be an infinite number of persons. But then we get the absurdity that Socrates can practice benevolence by eating breakfast, because in doing so he is contributing to the feeding of this infinity of persons. Moreover, it is unclear why he should ever practice benevolence in regard to, say, Alcibiades or Plato, at the cost of himself, because the cost to himself is also a cost to infinitely many persons, and surely we should not practice benevolence at a cost to infinitely many persons!

(2) Michael Rea in discussion has given a similar solution to a similar objection, if memory serves me.

(3) They cite *Topics* A7, 103a23–31; *Metaphysics* D6, 1015b16–22, 1016b32–1017a6.

(4) If Kripkeans are right that the initial matter of an object is essential to its identity, the statue in that world must *initially* have the same matter as it does in our world. So the two four-dimensional worms will have *some* matter in common.

(5) I do not accidentally choose this triplet. I have heard it said that in the past some progressive congregations have replaced “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” by “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier,” apparently more worried about gender implications than about Modalism.

(6) Cf. Michael Gorman, “The Essential and the Accidental,” *Ratio* 18 (2005): 276–89.

(7) One reason to include the qualifier “ordinary” is because the incarnate Christ might count as a material object, but has two natures, humanity and divinity. If both are primary, then this is a case we need to exclude by using the word “ordinary.”

(8) We can say that *x*, *y*, and *z* are three$_a$ iff *x* is not the same$_a$ as *y*, and *x* is not the same$_a$ as *z*, and *y* is not the same$_a$ as *z*.

(9) It might be objected that the primary form of Socrates-sitting is his seatedness (Rea, personal communication). But Socrates-sitting, if he is distinct at all from Socrates, is surely ontologically dependent on Socrates. Just as only a nose can be snub, to use Aristotle's example from *Metaphysics*Z5, Socrates-

sitting is capable of sitting precisely because he is human—if he were a book or a snake, the predicate “is sitting” could not apply to him, except in an alogical or even equivocal sense. It is the humanity of Socrates that unites Socrates’ matter into a whole. The seatedness does none of that. Thus, a primary role in the constitution of Socrates-sitting as an entity is still played by Socrates’ humanity, which is the primary form there.

(10) I am very grateful to Michael Rea for his patience and his comments that have significantly improved this paper.

# Part IV

# The Threeness/Oneness

# Problem in Contemporary Theology

# The Trinity in Theology and Philosophy: Why Jerusalem Should Work with Athens

**Alan G. Padgett**

No one who has read this volume carefully can deny that the doctrine of the Trinity has become an interesting and important topic in contemporary philosophical theology. It is also the case that this doctrine is a strong and central theme in contemporary systematic theology, dating back to the early work of Karl Barth.[1] What might appear to be a bit strange is the lack of serious conversation between these two kinds of authors and movements. The analytic philosophers of religion (or "philosophers" for short in this chapter) spend a great deal of energy, creativity, and literary output arguing about the Trinity, but mostly they work with theologians from the distant past or other analytic philosophers. The work of such philosophers, on the other hand, is not very well received by doctrinal or systematic theologians (henceforth "theologians"). There are of course notable exceptions to these opening generalizations. The theologian Bruce Marshall is in serious conversation with analytic philosophy, as his important monograph *Trinity and Truth* makes clear.[2] Another important exception is the collected volume, *The Trinity*, edited by Steven T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins, which is the published results from an international colloquium of bible scholars, theologians, and analytic philosophers.[3] Some of the chapters give the lie to the notion that theologians and philosophers do not pay attention to each other's work on the Trinity. Finally, an early monograph by the theologian and philosopher David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* is one of the best works balancing the two methods.[4] But these volumes stand out as being somewhat unusual. For the most part, when theologians write about the Trinity today they often overlook or purposefully dismiss what philosophers are writing on the topic. My purpose in this chapter is to argue that the theologians in Jerusalem **(p.330)** should pay more attention to what the philosophers are up to in Athens when writing and thinking about the Triune God.

My thesis is a simple one. Christian systematic theologians should be interested in the coherence of the models of the Trinity which philosophers study and (re-) create; but they should not be too interested. The work of philosophers on this topic is important *but not central* to the work of Christian doctrine. Thus theologians should pay serious but limited attention to the work of contemporary

philosophers on the Trinity. To make my point we will need to take a brief look at theological method.

## What is the Task of Systematic Theology?

To answer the question of how theology and philosophy might relate to one another, some grasp of the nature and tasks of Christian doctrine (systematic and moral theology) is called for. It is obvious to the casual reader of systematic theology books that no agreed-upon methodology, or even a set of schools with differing methods, exists within the broad range of theology today. I am therefore going to limit my remarks to those theologians who believe as I do that Christian theology should be grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so in the Scriptures and in the great classical tradition of historic Christian faith. Great theologians of the recent past as diverse as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, or Hans U. von Bathasar and Gustavo Gutierrez would fit into this large and diverse stream at the heart of our theological tradition.

To clarify a doctrine, its truth and meaning for today, theologians in this broad and mainstream approach will look to the Scriptures as primary sources of revelation. Both Barth and Rahner not only sought to make the doctrine of the Trinity more meaningful for believers today, but to bring the doctrine more closely into connection with the biblical witness.[5] To return to a previous example, it might seem strange that a book noted for its engagement with analytic philosophy, *Trinity and Truth*, does not attend to the work of philosophers on the Trinity. When he discusses the nature and centrality of this doctrine for Christian faith, Marshall draws instead upon Scripture (at least to some degree); classic Christian tradition including liturgy; and major theologians like Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther. I do not find this to be a problem with the book, although it struck me as strange when I first read it. Marshall rightly draws his central notions about the Trinity from the major sources of Christian theological understanding, that is, from Jesus Christ, the Old and New Testaments, and the long ecumenical tradition of consensual and canonical Christian thought which makes its way into our ecumenical creeds, confessions, and forms of worship.

**(p.331)** Given this understanding of the goals and sources of Christian doctrine as an academic exercise, it can hardly be thought strange that theologians do not look in the first instance to the work of philosophers on the Trinity. Instead, theologians pay attention to Scripture, tradition, and the great doctors of the

Church in seeking to make this classical teaching relevant and meaningful for believers today. David Brown also follows this approach in his important monograph, *The Divine Trinity*. It is only after establishing the viability of the doctrine of the Trinity in part II of his book, along with the Incarnation with which it is closely associated, that he then turns to concerns drawn from philosophical issues in part III ("The Coherence of the Doctrine"). This seems to me to be exactly the proper order for Christian theologians in thinking through this complex and essential belief about the biblical God. For it is in consideration of the coherence of the orthodox and biblical doctrine of the Trinity that philosophy can be of the most use to theology. At this point Jerusalem needs to work more closely with Athens so that both can bring clarity to Christian thought.

## Mystery and Clarity in Theology

I would argue that it is at the point of coherence that theology can find great help from philosophy on this topic. Yet the search for a coherent theology is not always looked upon with favor in today's climate of postmodern sensitivities and religious diversity. May not the whole quest for coherence in theology be a mistake? Is not God beyond human comprehension, as Aquinas taught along with so many great theologians (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.2, a.2)?

Yes indeed, God is beyond human understanding. This is the consensual teaching of the ecumenical Church. The influential Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky puts it this way: "The dogma of the Trinity is a cross for human ways of thought…no philosophical speculation has ever succeeded in rising to the mystery of the Holy Trinity."[6] Yes, the doctrine of the Trinity is a very difficult one to grasp and to teach others. As such it is a cross for human thinking. So if by "rising to the mystery" of God Lossky means discovering a complete explanation of this mystery through philosophical analysis, then he must be correct. That's not going to happen. But if by "rising to the mystery" he means that philosophy and human reason can bring *no clarity at all* to this mystery, he has gone too far. His statement would then have to be rejected as too apophatic, too much on the negative side of the *via negativa*. On the Roman Catholic side we can point to the influential nineteenth-century theologian John Henry Newman. In his *Grammar of Assent* he argues that we can find good biblical and traditional reasons to affirm the basic ideas that provide the background for trinitarian orthodoxy. But a clear and logical model of the Trinity is not to be achieved by human reason. "The question is whether a real assent to the mystery,

as such, is possible; and I say it is not possible, because, though we can **(p.332)** imagine the separate propositions, we cannot imagine them together."[7] I would say, in response, that the careful work of philosophers on this doctrine from Augustine and Aquinas to today shows Newman's assertion is too cautious. We can indeed "imagine them together" and this is *exactly* the value of philosophical work on the Trinity for the theologian and for the Church.

The biblical God seeks to be known by humans, both intellectually and personally. Thus God is a revealing God, and not merely a hidden One. The task of academic theology as a response to the Word of God is the happy one of seeking to know God from the ground of this revelation. As such, theology is a *human good work*. It cannot and should not be confused with revelation itself nor with the being of God. Everything of God is a mystery when rightly understood, for nothing about God can be fully grasped by human thinking or language. And yet God is known in human language, in and among human beings. All theology is about a very deep mystery, therefore, and not just the "hard" bits. Because theology is a human good work in response to this divine mystery, the language of theology should be as clear, rational, and coherent as possible. After all the Subject we speak of is complex enough – we should not add to the burden of our listeners with our own obfuscation and incoherence. I have argued elsewhere that theology should embrace a dialectical realism. Dialectical realism is a realist program in epistemol-ogy which takes critical realism one step farther.[8] It insists that truth can be found, but is never final, because reality comes to us through various media and in all our particularity. The quest for truth is not merely individual but communal, not only logical but traditional, not simply at a moment but taking place over time and history. Even so modest an approach to epistemology will nevertheless insist upon coherence. Dialectic and paradox are not the same as incoherence, for a set of ideas (statements) that are incoherent cannot all be true. As a human good work in response to the grace and Word of God, as "faith seeking understanding" (Anselm) theology seeks the truth about God. It therefore must shun incoherence and irrationality. Sometimes "mystery" is evoked as an excuse for sloppy thinking, and this must be anathema to any academic theology worthy of the name. After all, the mystery of God does not end when theology speaks clearly. The simple phrase, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so" covers vast, deep mysteries that even the angels gaze into with awe and wonder.

## Theology and Coherence

One of the main ways in which theology is systematic lies in the quest for coherence. Systematic theology seeks to present a coherent visionof God, humanity, **(p.333)** and the world, with a special focus on our lives in relationship to God and each other. Here there is a problem that often arises in interdisciplinary conversations. Important and familiar words do not mean the same thing in differing disciplines. So it is with "coherence" in theology and philosophy. For the philosopher (analytic, of course) coherence is a logical property of propositions in themselves or as a set. Its most basic sense boils down to lack of logical incoherence, i.e. an absence of formal inconsistency. While this notion has the merit of being logically precise, it is almost never what theologians mean by "coherence," and many philosophers also mean rather more by the phrase as well. Often theologians look for things like narrative coherence: the way things fit together and make sense in a story. A classic example of this is Augustine, *The City of God*, but it is also a fundamentally biblical concern. Of course narrative coherence is much more vague than logical coherence: but the criteria can be useful and meaningful nevertheless.

In addition to this sense of coherence, theologians also look for that broad sense of coherence that Idealist philosophers of the early twentieth century like F. H. Bradley would call coherence, i.e. the beautiful way that ideas can fit together into a whole. This notion is developed more rigorously by modern followers of coherence theories of justification within epistemology.[9] To take an example from theology, in his classic text *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm says that he is going to give us "rational and necessary" reasons for why the Atonement had to take place. But in the give and take of his argument, he very often makes appeal to what is "fitting" for God, or due to a moral sense of "right order." These things have more to do with morality and aesthetics than they do with rational necessities (*Cur Deus Homo*, preface; i.1; cf. i.2). Elsewhere I have called this a "thematic" coherence, and it seems to me the category of rational beauty is the central virtue for theological coherence in this case.[10] Of course we have to say that theologians do not want their works to be logically incoherent! Both theologians and philosophers are interested in various kinds of coherence. But the category of "coherence" often means more than logical and conceptual coherence in works of systematic theology. This needs to be remembered by philosophers who read them, and who seek to create coherent models of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## But Not too Seriously

In the long history of the Church and its academic theological reflection, two broad models of the Trinity have been proposed. We can call them the social model and the psychological ("Latin") model. Both of these models find **(p.334)** defenders among the great theological doctors of the Church as well as contemporary philosophers. On the one hand, the theologian of today should be very grateful for the excellent, technical work of analytic philosophers in developing logically coherent and metaphysically plausible versions of the Triune God. These models, although not compatible among themselves, allow the Church to respond well to modern claims that the doctrine of the Trinity is in and of itself irrational or incoherent. Yet the importance of this work does not stop here. By developing such careful and sophisticated models the philosopher helps the theologian (and the believer in general) speak with greater precision, clarity, and coherence about the Triune God. While appreciating this work, at the same time the theologian and the Church will not take these models too seriously.

It would be wrong in the domain of dogma to take up either the social or the psychological model and make it into the one and only "right" view. This would be to take too seriously the ability of philosophers or theologians to penetrate into the mystery of the Trinity. Dogmas, remember, are not just true theological statements but decisive confessions of central importance to the identity of the Christian faith. As such, they should be modest affairs, stating what must be stated to maintain the historic, biblical faith in diverse times and places. What is more, the differing models of the Trinity from the patristic age until today sustain important insights and point out serious problems which the Church would do well to remember. Embracing just one model might veer the faithful too far toward the problems associated with it, ignoring the important correctives which the other model embodies. As we can see from the debate between philosophers in this volume, for example Brian Leftow and Richard Swinburne, those who adopt a psychological model will press for *mono*theism in trinitarian thought, so that tritheism or Arianism is avoided. Those philosophers like Swinburne who seek to develop a social model will want to insist that the differences between the *personae* of the One God are fully respected, so that modalism or unitarianism is avoided. Both authors are right in what they are seeking to avoid. Both have something valuable to add to the theological conversation. Neither one has the last word to say on the subject, nor should the Church simply adopt one model instead of the other. In general, theologians today will be far too respectful of the mystery of God to sign on to any one specific, fully developed philosophical model. Here theologians like Lossky and

Newman provide important cautions we need to take seriously when getting involved in all the technical niceties of philosophical debate.

At this point the serious philosopher might well demur. She has worked hard on developing a serious, sustained model of the Trinity that draws upon significant work in logic, analytic metaphysics, and philosophy in general. Having posed the very best viewpoint available, she might well complain that the theologian does not take her work seriously enough to accept it as true. While such an attitude is understandable, the point being made is a more general one. Theology will always take its sources in special revelation and the Word more seriously than even the best developed theories based upon them. All such models will have to be taken as provisional and partial, because of the great Subject with**(p.335)** which we have to deal. The dangers of both modalism and tritheism, among others, will of necessity be kept in mind by the larger Church. No one particular intellectual's model of the Trinity should be accepted as the final insight. It is simply not possible for us quite so neatly and completely to spell out the nature of the infinite Creator whose full comprehension is beyond the ken of mere mortals.

I have been arguing that Christian theologians should take the work of philosophers on the Trinity more seriously than they have in recent years. We theologians have much of value to learn from our sisters and brothers in philosophy who are writing important, highly learned works on the nature of the Trinity. These works can assist theology in its quest for clarity and coherence in seeking to know God and respond properly to the Word of God. Exactly because of theology's supreme attachment to the Word in Christ Jesus, the Scriptures, and the revelation made known in the great tradition, theologians will want to work closely with philosophers without simply becoming philosophy by another name. They will take the developed work of philosophers seriously, but not too seriously.

Notes:

(1) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975 [1932]).

(2) Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

(3) Oxford University Press, 1999. See also the papers from an international conference in Russia published as The *Trinity: East/ West Dialogue*, ed. M. Y. Stewart (Boston: Kluwer, 2003) but with less evidence of mutual interaction

between philosophers and theologians.

(4) London: Duckworth, 1985.

(5) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

(6) Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: J. Clark, 1957), 66.

(7) John Henry Newman, *Grammar of Assent* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 155.

(8) A. G. Padgett, *Science and the Study of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) or my article,"Dialectical Realism in Theology and Science," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 54 (2002) 184–92.

(9) See, e.g., Nicholas Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973)or Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

(10) A. G. Padgett, "Systematic Theology," in K. Sakenfeld et al. (eds.), *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009).

# Theologians, Philosophers, and the Doctrine of the Trinity

**Thomas McCall**

It is no secret that the last few decades have witnessed a “renaissance” of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity.[1] “Constructive” or “systematic” theologians in particular have taken the lead in the task of “recovering” the doctrine. They have worked to re-formulate the doctrine, and they have also labored to show that Kant was simply wrong when he laid down his now infamous dictum that “the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has *no practical relevance at all*, even if we think that we understand it; and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts.”[2] Many of these contemporary theologians now see the doctrine of the Trinity to be what one theologian calls “a veritable treasure trove of ethical and practical riches, not least of which is its redolence for human social form and function.”[3] From the ranks of theologians we now see an outpouring of literature: exegetical studies of the purported biblical basis of the doctrine, historical studies of the development of the doctrine, and contemporary restatements of it – not to mention the vast avalanche of articles, essays, and monographs now “applying” the doctrine to such diverse fields as religious epistemology, theological anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.[4] Surely these discussions of Trinitarian doctrine are alive and well in systematic theology.

But many of these theologians seem relatively ignorant of – or else monumentally unimpressed by – a parallel discussion that is taking place among analytic philosophers of religion. These philosophers are also keenly interested in the doctrine, and they are engaged in discourse that is both spirited and rigorous (as is evidenced by the essays in this volume). Curiously, though, there is a lack of **(p.337)** awareness and interaction between these philosophical theologians and the systematic (or “dogmatic” or “constructive”) theologians. On those occasions where we do see some level of awareness and interaction, it is sometimes marked by a coldly dismissive attitude or even outright hostility. For “Exhibit A” see Robert W. Jenson's discussion of “reinvigorated English-language ‘theism’ [which is] often somewhat oddly related to the Christian faith it claims to defend,” and especially his dismissal of the work of Richard Swinburne as a “truly bizarre case.”[5]

I am convinced that both analytic and systematic theologians can – and should –

do better than this. In this essay I make a modest effort at bridge-building. I try to show how contemporary theologians might benefit from engagement with the analytic discussions, and I work further to understand why they do not often do so. Seeking to address several of what I take to be their primary concerns, I conclude that more engagement and appropriation can be mutually edifying and beneficial.

## Why Theologians should Care

Theologians should care about the discussions taking place among analytic philosophers of religion for at least two general but important reasons: the tools and proposals of the analytic theologians can assist the theologians in the construction and defense of their own models, and the theologians may be able to be of service to the philosophers as well.

As Catherine Mowry LaCugna notes, “the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be exempted any more than any other doctrine from logical scrutiny.”[6] And yet the proposals of several major theologians stand in obvious need of help. Consider a couple of examples.

Karl Barth is well-known for his insistent rejection of the view that the divine “persons” are (or possess) distinct centers of consciousness and will. He explicitly rejects the notion that divine unity is “a mere unity of kind or a mere collective unity”; instead he insists that we should hold to “the numerical unity of the essence of the ‘persons.”’[7] In fact, he proposes the term “mode of being” (*Seinsweisen*) as a replacement for the more traditional *person*. For “the meaning of the doctrine is not, then, that there are three personalities in God. This would be the worst and most extreme expression of tritheism, against which we must be on guard.”[8] He cautions against thinking that there is anything like an “I – Thou” relationship within the Trinity: “we are not speaking of three divine ‘I's, but thrice of the one divine I.”[9] Thus there are not “three different personalities, three **(p.338)** self-existent individuals with their own special self-consciousness, cognition, volition, activity, effects, revelation, and name. The one name of the one God is the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The one ‘personality’ of God, the one active and speaking divine Ego, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Otherwise we should obviously have to speak of three gods.”[10] And this would be nothing short of “mythology.”[11]

Instead, Barth insists, we are to understand that the three modes of being are

really just God somehow three times over; God is somehow revealed "three times in different senses."[12] Thus the Son is "God a second time in a different way."[13] The divine name, "the name of the Father, Son and Spirit means that God is the one God in threefold repetition."[14] There is one divine "Ego," one divine "I," who subsists simultaneously in three different ways – in three different "modes (or ways) of being."[15]

Curiously, though, Barth also appears to want the benefits of a robustly "three-person" account. He regularly speaks of the love and fellowship shared between the Father and the Son, and he regards this shared love as absolutely vital to the doctrine of the Trinity.[16] Speaking of the Son, he says straightforwardly that "the Father affirms and loves Him and He the Father, in a mutual fellowship."[17]

Unfortunately, there is an apparent inconsistency here.[18] In fact, it is glaring. If the Father is not a distinct "I" in relation to the Son who is a "Thou," then we have no idea what it might mean for the Father to say "I am the Father, and I love my Son." If the Son is not an "I" in relation to the Father from whom he is distinct as a "Thou," then we are left to wonder how we are to make sense of the claims that the Son obeys, glorifies, and loves the Father. As Jenson puts it, "Barth's exemplary use of Western doctrine thus displays what can only be called an 'I – Thou' trinitarianism. The Father and the Son are unproblematically understood as persons in mutual converse, whose mutuality constitutes the triune life and is the ground of God's acts *ad extra*."[19] So taken overall, Barth's Trinitarian theology requires an "I – Thou" relationship within the Godhead – but his explicit statements on the topic decisively rule it out. Unfortunately, Barth never explains just how it is that his view might be coherent (whether he finally avoids modalism is another matter).

Here is where help might come from an unlikely source: Brian Leftow's model. While I have doubts about how well Leftow's account represents (or even is **(p.339)** consistent with) the Latin tradition for which it is named, it does cohere remarkably well with Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. While Barth would no doubt be incensed at the very idea that the Rockettes might even possibly serve as an analogue of the Holy Trinity, Leftow's model – like Barth's – is resistant to "Social Trinitarianism" and holds to numerical oneness.[20] Barth insists that God is the (numerically) one God "in threefold repetition," and this seems to be (at least part of) what Leftow's analogy is meant to illustrate. Both want to avoid anything that even remotely smacks of polytheism, and both want to avoid Sabellian modalism. But where Barth offers an extensive and developed

discussion of the doctrine, but then leaves us perplexed at this important juncture, Leftow (though without the extensive theological development) provides an analogy and set of arguments that offer aid to Barth's model. If Leftow's model successfully avoids modalism, it might offer coherence to Barth's account – which otherwise remains puzzling at best and perhaps even internally unstable.[21]

Other examples could be multiplied. Jürgen Moltmann, for instance, when faced with criticisms that his "Social Trinitarianism" really amounts to tritheism, surely would do well to do more than simply retort that tritheism "has never existed."[22] He might do well to access the defenses brought forth by Richard Swinburne or other contemporary analytic proponents of Social Trinitarianism. Or the defender of the Trinitarian theology of Thomas F. Torrance, who holds that there are three divine persons in a robust sense of "person" – three divine I's who relate to one another as "Thou's" within the life of God – but who denies that the divine unity can be reduced to a mere generic unity, might find aid and comfort in the models offered by, say, either Michael Rea and Jeffrey Brower or Keith Yandell.[23]

Theologians should care about the issues addressed by the philosophers. They should care because, by their own testimony, the doctrine of the Trinity is of such central importance. Nicholas Lash puts the matter "as baldly, and hence as contentiously, as possible" when he declares that "the doctrine of the Trinity simply is the Christian doctrine of God."[24] Karl Barth's view is similar: "the doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what distinguishes the Christian doctrine of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation."[25] But as important as the doctrine itself is to the Christian faith, so also are the challenges to **(p.340)** it serious indeed. For charges related to the "logical problem of the Trinity" are such that if they are successful, then the doctrine of the Trinity is not even*possibly* true. In this case it would not simply happen to be untrue, it would be *necessarily* false. Thus, by the theologian's own admission, the Christian doctrine of God would be necessarily false. Surely this should get the attention of theologians. And just as surely they should welcome the work of the philosophers of religion. They may worry that the approaches and concerns of the philosophers are too narrow; they may say that the philosophers are missing much (maybe most) of what is important about the doctrine. I must admit some sympathy with such worries. But to say this is not to say that the task to which the philosophers have set

themselves is unimportant, nor is it to deny that they have anything useful to contribute.

## Why Theologians are Suspicious

Yet systematic theologians tend to be suspicious of the work of the philosophical theologians. Why is this the case? Without attempting to be exhaustive, in this section I discuss several of the major causes.

### Distrust of Analogies (or Vestigia)

Barth is famous for his outright rejection of all searches for any analogy or *vestigium trinitatis*.[26] And, of course, the current analytic project is filled with proffered analogies. From dancing starlets and time machines to lumps and statues to friends and families to three-headed dogs, the analytic approach undeniably trades in analogies. Thus it is understandable that theologians attracted to Barth's approach to theology will have some initial distaste for the work of the philosophers.

In response, several comments seem appropriate. First, I readily admit that an over-reliance on analogies can be unhelpful. Analogies are, after all, just that: they are intended to illustrate some aspect or aspects of the primary subject while not being expected to be exactly parallel or parallel in all areas. If the theologian (analytic or otherwise) were to approach these discussions with an implicit requirement that any analogy must function perfectly to be helpful, then she is doomed to be both sidetracked and disappointed. On the other hand, it is not obvious that analogies are *necessarily*problematic. Barth's own view seems to be well out of the historic theological mainstream on this, and one analogy is at least hinted at in Scripture.[27]

**(p.341)** At any rate, though, analytic philosophical theology is not tied to the use of analogies at all. Although they are common and popular (and it is obvious enough that many of the contributors to this volume find them helpful), use of analogies is not essential to the use of analytic tools in Trinitarian theology. This is well illustrated by the essays of Peter van Inwagen and Keith Yandell: neither make use of analogies at all.

### Allegations of Univocity

Some theologians may worry that the current philosophical discussions proceed with an unrealistic and unhealthy naivety regarding the nature and function of

religious language. More specifically, the concern may be that the kind of theological discourse employed by philosophers of religion in the analytic tradition is committed to univocity – and such a commitment is charged with being both unrealistic and potentially idolatrous.[28]

A general discussion of religious language is far beyond the scope of this essay, but several observations demand to be made. First, it should be noted that the case *against* univocity should not be merely assumed (as if some particular theological proposal could be damned simply by showing that it assumes univocity). Nor is the case *for* univocity nearly so weak as is often supposed. To the contrary, univocity has serious and sophisticated defenders today.[29]

The second point is more directly relevant to our discussion. It is this: the kind of philosophical theology represented in this volume requires no commitment to univocity whatsoever. Indeed, some of our contributors have expressed their own preferences for something much closer to Aquinas' account of analogical religious language. Perhaps there is a general sense in which it is true that philosophers of religion are naive about religious language (although I doubt this very much, and it would be ironic indeed if a discipline sometimes still called "ordinary language philosophy" was uniformly or even mostly naive at this point), but this would not necessarily make philosophical theology different from or inferior to theology that prefers other methods and modes of discourse. It is no reason to avoid or dismiss the kind of theology practiced in this volume. It is, rather, a red herring.

## **(p.342)** Emphasis on the Priority of Revelation

Closely related is the concern of some theologians to maintain the priority of revelation. The concern here, as I see it, is that analytic philosophical theology tries to "prove" the doctrine of the Trinity via appeal to some kind of natural theology. This concern may go to different levels: some theologians may worry that trying to "prove" the Trinity may distract us from more important business, discredit Christian theology, or simply take us to a dead-end, while other theologians might agree with Barth that natural theology is the "invention of the Antichrist" and can *only* serve to corrupt the truth.[30]

It is true that some Trinitarian theologians have attempted to argue for the doctrine of the Trinity "apart from" what Christians sometimes call "special revelation." Richard of St. Victor serves as a classic exemplar of this approach. Among recent philosophical theologians, this method can be seen in the work of

Richard Swinburne, Edward Wierenga,[31] and Stephen T. Davis. In the line of the Victorine, Swinburne argues that "the data which suggest that there is a God suggest that the most probable kind of God is such that he inevitably becomes tripersonal" and he concludes that what he has "presented as a priori a marginally more probable account of the divine nature than any other, becomes enormously more probable if backed up by revelation."[32]

But there is nothing inherent in the work of analytic philosophical theology as such that might require such an approach. In fact, many analytic philosophers of religion do not take this route at all. Many of the contributors to this volume, for instance, see their task very differently: some of them would likely insist that the doctrine of the Trinity is in any case very surprising and even radically counterintuitive, and it is highly unlikely that Christians would ever have believed it on the basis of arguments drawn from natural theology. No, many of our analytic theologians likely would say, we only believe the doctrine of the Trinity to be true on the basis of revelation. But given our belief that the doctrine (or, more properly, the basic components that lead us to the doctrine) is revealed to us, it is perfectly legitimate to attempt both to understand it better and to defend it from charges that it *cannot* be revealed to us because it is not even possibly true. All told, there is nothing to this objection that counts against the use of analytic tools in the explication and defense of the doctrine of the Trinity (at least not any more than would count against other forms or styles of theology). I agree wholeheartedly with the critics that some philosophical theologians need to be more attentive to the biblical witness that gave rise to the doctrine in the first place – after all, why defend a version of the doctrine that is not even consonant with what gave rise to it? But there is nothing inherent in analytic treatments of the doctrine that necessarily would cause the theologian to downplay, stifle, or ignore the received deliverances of revelation.

## **(p.343)** Hostility toward "Substance Metaphysics"

Some theologians may harbor ill will toward analytic philosophical theology due to its commitment to, and employment of, substance metaphysics. For instance, Ted Peters, John Macquarrie, Robert Jenson, and others have rejected substance metaphysics for various reasons: the suspected ties to outmoded doctrines of immutability, simplicity, and impassibility, the worry that traditional usages of the category of substance have been overly optimistic about the possibilities of knowledge of God, and even "obsolescence."[33] Similarly, Moltmann has rejected traditional formulations due to their reliance on substance metaphysics.[34]

William P. Alston has responded to such rejection of “substance metaphysics,” and I have little to add to his observations. Still, perhaps it will be helpful to summarize his conclusion. He deftly analyzes the criticisms put forth by the revisionists who reject substance metaphysics, and he argues that in all cases their criticisms are wide of the mark: “once we get straight as to what is and is not necessarily included in any metaphysics of substance, we will see that most twentieth-century objections to the use of substance metaphysics in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity are based on features of such formulations that are not required by substance metaphysics as such.”[35] Alston shows that the perceived connections between traditional formulations of doctrines such as immutability and simplicity are *not* tied to substance metaphysics, and he argues that “contemporary theologians who object to substantialist formulations on the grounds that features from the above list are objectionable have failed to understand what is essential to substance metaphysics…and so even if they are justified in their strictures against characterizing God as immutable, timeless, impassible, and not really related to creatures, that does not tell against all substantialist formulations of the Trinity.”[36] His conclusion is appropriate: “Inveighing against substance on these grounds only serves to divert attention from the real problems in trinitarianism that need addressing.”[37]

## The Shadow of Kant

Reflection on worries about religious language brings us to a closely related area of concern, one that is evidenced in Kenneth Surin's observations on David Brown's *The Divine Trinity*.[38] Clearly concerned about Brown's robust theological realism and “pertinacious univocality,” he says that Brown's “predilection for describing in detail the inner life of the Godhead shows *The Divine Trinity* to be a**(p.344)** robustly old-fashioned, pre-Kantian kind of book.”[39] Surin complains that Brown violates Kant's “stricture that the principle of causality can be schematized only if its application is confined to the world of appearances,” and he says that Brown's tendency to act as if our theological statements actually could refer to “the mysterious reality of God” shows that Brown “has perhaps not been sufficiently attentive to the irreducibly ‘linguistic’ or ‘grammatical’ features of discourse *in divinis*.”[40]He warns that Brown's view that there is something about our language that might allow it actually to correspond to the divine can only push us “along the royal road that leads from the self-securing Cartesian *cogito* to the atheism of Feuerbach.”[41]

Somewhat similarly, Karen Kilby criticizes the efforts of various proponents of

Social Trinitarianism to find and apply the “relevance” of the doctrine to various ecclesial, social, and political agendas, and then concludes that the best way forward is to renounce the possibility of going forward at all. Her own proposal is “not that one should move from a social back to, say, a psychological approach to the Trinity – that would simply be to look for a *different* insight – but rather that one should renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine is to give insight into God.”[42] Rather than expect the doctrine of the Trinity to tell us anything about who God is (and perhaps from there something about what it means to be made in the divine image), we should understand that its function is to serve as a kind of “grammar” that forms Christian speech. Following George Lindbeck's account of *The Nature of Doctrine*,[43] she denies that the doctrine is intended to “provide a picture of the divine, a deep understanding of the way God really is.” Instead, the real purpose of the doctrine is to give us a “rule, or perhaps a set of rules, for how to read the Biblical stories, how to speak about some of the characters we come across in these stories, how to think and talk about the experience of prayer, how to deploy the ‘vocabulary’ of Christianity in an appropriate way.”[44]

This is hardly the place for an extended defense of theological realism, but it is simply not the case that analytic theologians are ignorant of Kant's “strictures.” It would be more than a bit ironic if the philosophers of religion needed theologians **(p.345)** to inform them of the nature and importance of Kant's views on religious knowledge and language. To the contrary, many of them are well acquainted with Kant – and quite a few of them see his influence on subsequent generations of theology as unfortunate (at least in large measure).[45] As Nicholas Wolterstorff argues, it is much more likely that the current renaissance of work on theological subjects by analytic philosophers of religion is not naively “pre-Kantian” so much as it is “post-Kantian.”[46] Much to the surprise of some theologians and scholars of religion, he says,

> it really is possible to be post-Kantian. It's possible to recover from Kant. The choices are not exhausted between being naively pre-Kantian, on the one hand, and being a Kantian of one or another stripe, on the other. Those who have most enraptured contemporary academia with their narratives of contemporary philosophy have talked as if the waters of philosophy rushed down just one channel after the dam of classically modern foundationalism broke: Down the channel of interpretation-universalism and metaphysical anti-realism. But they didn’t all rush down one channel. Philosophy after foundationalism has gone down two very different channels. And one of

> these channels is post-Kantian as much as it is post-foundationalist. The philosophers who swim in this channel – to change the metaphor slightly – are not naively uninformed. They are fully aware of interpretation-universalism and fully aware of metaphysical anti-realism; but after serious consideration, they have rejected these options as untenable.[47]

To the charge that analytic theological work on the doctrine of the Trinity is "realist," the analytic theologian can quite happily plead "guilty." And then the analytic theologian can invite the critical theologian to consider as well whether or not theology has been in servitude to Kant for much too long.

## Worries about Ahistorical Interpretations

Another concern expressed by some contemporary systematic theologians is this: the current analytic discussion all too often proceeds with little awareness of the complex but important historical factors associated with the development and formulation of the doctrine. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, for instance, chides analytic philosophers of religion on this point. She says that "from a theologian's**(p.346)** point of view, exegesis of dogmatic or theological statements requires setting them within their own particular history. This means taking into account, first of all, the whole context of a theologian's writings, including his/her development over time. It means placing a theological system in the wider context of the history of theology."[48] Analytic philosophers of religion – to understate the point rather drastically – are often criticized for their ignorance of the history of the development of dogma, and for their lack of careful study to understand the particular social and intellectual setting of the person(s) being studied. Instead, so the story goes, it is all too common for them to approach a topic by isolating a particular text and then breaking it down to unpack the real "core" of the doctrine in question. And the assumption is often enough that this can be safely or appropriately done with little or no reference to the particular context in which the statement was made. As Fred Sanders puts it, "philosophers sometimes seem to think of ancient texts as cumbersome delivery systems containing ideas which it is their job to extract from the delivery system and do something with."[49]

At least this is how the story is often told. A major underlying worry seems to be that reading texts with proper attention to their contexts can cause us to misread and misunderstand the text in question. I admit that I feel the force of this concern, and I also admit that this is an unhelpful tendency among some analytic theologians. But it seems obvious to me that this is not at all essential to the use

of analytic tools in theology, and indeed there are many happy exceptions.[50] Moreover, the problem is not restricted to analytic theologians – the temptation to read texts only for "our purposes" is no respecter of persons or parties, and systematic theologians are often guilty of it as well. Even LaCugna, after criticizing "philosophers of religion" for overlooking "the essentially historical character of trinitarian theology" – particularly for missing the important differences between the "Greek (or 'Cappadocian') East" and the "Latin (or 'Augustinian') West" – finds her own proposal now subject to criticism for drastically *overplaying* any differences between Western and Eastern patristic theology.[51]

**(p.347)** At any rate, though, I can see no reason why this tendency must be either essential or endemic to analytic theological work on the doctrine of the Trinity.[52] Surely more progress needs to be made in this area, but perhaps philosophical and systematic theologians will join forces with biblical and historical theologians once again. I see no reason why this *cannot* happen, but I see plenty of reasons why it *should*.

## Criticisms of "Thin Descriptions" and Shallow Doxologies

Another concern (or set of concerns) about the kind of theology in this volume is this: analytic theologians approach the doctrine of the Trinity as if the doctrine were really a very complicated logical conundrum, one worthy of interest and inherently challenging. The "task," then, of Trinitarian theology is straightforward: figure it out, and then move on to something else. But, no – a thousand times, no! – say the critics, the doctrine of the Trinity is not a mathematical puzzle; "getting the doctrine right" is not about figuring out how to line up the propositions in just the right way, and then checking off "Trinity" from the list of theological things to do. No, say the critics, the doctrine of the Trinity is about so much *more* than this – it is about contemplation, personal communion, transformation. Doctrine is meant to do so much more than merely inform; through various speech-acts, doctrines accomplish much more than the transference of information. Trinitarian theology is not about solving a problem – it is about worship. For in coming to knowledge of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we come to know God – we come to worship, obey, glorify, and love the God who is Triune. Thus the analytic project is just too "thin," and it does not result in doxology.

I admit to a great deal of sympathy for such concerns. I agree heartily that the task of Trinitarian theology cannot be limited to the goal of solving a curious

intellectual puzzle. I agree that genuine knowledge of the Holy Trinity will result in worship. This is how Christians came to the doctrine of the Trinity in the first place; Christians tried to make sense of the exalted and to-be-worshiped Christ. Analytic theologians would do well to remember this, and to find place for worship in their theological work.

Still, though, I do not see the tasks pursued by the analytic theologians as at all inimical to the broader purposes of Trinitarian theology.[53] To the contrary, I see **(p.348)** their work as important and potentially edifying to the broader purposes. Indeed, I see it as having something of a pastoral function. Perhaps it was only the rural Michiganders and rustic Alaskans I have had the privilege of serving as pastor, but I recall exactly no one who ever found themselves concerned about "onto-theology" or who were edified by "a theology of absence – where the name is given as having no name, as not giving the essence, and having nothing but this absence to make manifest."[54] I was, on the other hand, regularly surrounded by people who believed – very deeply and sometimes very fiercely – that the truly human Jesus was somehow also fully divine and one with his Father, that his life, death, and resurrection were somehow deeply meaningful because of who he was, and that somehow his Spirit was*present* with them today. They believed it to be true, and they believed that it mattered, and I saw many of them hold fast to this conviction at times of greatest hope and joy as well as at times of deepest disappointment and sorrow. They were also at points aware of challenges to their faith; on occasion they too were made to wonder if this luminous, beautiful doctrine at the very core of the Christian faith was perhaps necessarily false.

Although they articulated them rather differently, they believed that the issues addressed in this volume matter. They cared about the same issues that give rise to the problems addressed here. They cared about the truthfulness and meaningfulness of the central claims of the Christian faith – the same claims addressed in these essays. They knew that these things matter. And if analytic theologians remember this as well, their work may be of benefit to such people.

## Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to address – albeit very briefly – some of what I take to be the primary concerns that theologians have with the kind of theology found in these essays. After illustrating how systematic theology might benefit from engagement with analytic theology on the doctrine of the Trinity, I have explored several main barriers to engagement. In each case, I have tried to show either

that the worries are misplaced or that the theologians can offer valuable critique and mid-course correction to the philosophers. While I am under no illusions about having set aside all worries or turned away all criticisms, I hope that at least I have done enough to show that the kind of theology exemplified in this book is worthy of another look.

It takes work to have genuine cross-disciplinary conversation. And yet I suggest that the benefits are appreciable enough that we should renounce our animosity (and laziness, hubris, etc), and work together. For as Sanders says, "the kind of **(p.349)** systematic theology that is heavily informed by biblical exegesis and the history of doctrine would benefit greatly from the conceptual clarity which could be provided by the kind of philosophical theology that concentrates on analytic tasks. Similarly, philosophical theology could benefit from a closer encounter with the great themes of the Christian heritage, and a better understanding of the Biblical logic by which these themes emerged into conceptual form."[55] I concur, and I suggest that while analytic philosophers of religion would be well advised to keep in mind the grand sweep of Trinitarian theology, so also my fellow theologians should be grateful for the work of their philosophically trained allies. **(p.350)**

Notes:

(1) Thus Thomas R. Thompson, "Trinitarianism Today: Doctrinal Renaissance, Ethical Relevance, Social Redolence," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1997): 9–42, and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity," *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 169.

(2) Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 65, emphasis original.

(3) Thompson, "Trinitarianism Today," p. 10.

(4) Indeed, a cynical observer might be tempted to think that if a theologian wanted to give credibility, dignity, and *gravitas* to some theological proposal – no matter how half-baked or harebrained – the best thing she might do for it is to label it "A *Trinitarian* theology of ——."

(5) Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2: *The Works of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 8 n. 35.

(6) LaCugna, "Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity," p. 175.

(7) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), p. 350.

(8) Ibid., p. 351.

(9) Ibid., p. 351.

(10) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 205.

(11) Ibid., p. 65.

(12) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: 376.

(13) E.g., Ibid., pp. 318, 324.

(14) Ibid., p. 350.

(15) Ibid., p. 355.

(16) Among other reasons, this is important because for Barth the Holy Spirit is the love shared between the Father and Son, e.g., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: 466–89.

(17) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1: 204.

(18) For a helpful discussion of how Barth deals with contradictions (apparent and real) in theology, see Sebastian Rehnman, “Does It Matter if Christian Doctrine is Contradictory? Barth on Logic and Theology,” in David Gibson and Daniel Strange (eds.), *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 55–83.

(19) Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 155.

(20) At least on one reasonable interpretation of Leftow's model (which remains underdeveloped).

(21) Elsewhere I have expressed concerns about Leftow's account, see my forthcoming *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Systematic and Philosophical Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (tentative title). See also Michael C. Rea, “The Trinity,” in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 700–3.

(22) Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 144.

(23) Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 179.

(24) Nicholas Lash, "Considering the Trinity," *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 183.

(25) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: 301.

(26) Ibid.: 333–47.

(27) I refer to the so-called "social analogy" in John 17. On this see Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 25–27. Whether or not acceptance of this should take us all the way to "Social Trinitarianism" (and which version) is another matter.

(28) See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). For helpful discussion, see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). He notes that Radical Orthodoxy's critique of Scotus (for his advocacy of univocity) "borders on a fixation," p. 96.

(29) For recent defense of univocity, see, e.g., William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 17–117; Richard Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy," *Antonianum* 76 (2001): 1–36; andThomas Williams, "The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary," *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 575–85.

(30) More precisely, Barth says that the *analogia entis* (which is the basis for natural theology) is the "invention of the Antichrist," *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: xiii.

(31) Edward Wierenga, "Trinity and Polytheism," *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 281–94.

(32) See above, Ch.2, p. 000.

(33) See the discussion by William P. Alston, “Substance and the Trinity,” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 193–201. I here use “substance metaphysics” as does Alston in this essay.

(34) E.g., Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, pp. 10–12.

(35) Alston, “Substance and the Trinity,” p. 201.

(36) Ibid., p. 201.

(37) Ibid.

(38) David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1985).

(39) Kenneth Surin, “The Trinity and Philosophical Reflection: A Study of David Brown's *The Divine Trinity*,” *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 238–39. As Brown points out in his response, Surin conflates several issues here: “Wittgenstein Against the ‘Wittgensteinians’: A Reply to Kenneth Surin on *The Divine Trinity*,” *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 271.

(40) Surin, “The Trinity and Philosophical Reflection,” p. 239.

(41) Ibid., p. 239.

(42) Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 443.

(43) George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

(44) Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” p. 443. Matthew Levering argues that her position is one that is ultimately quite hopeless, and he urges a return to the approach of Thomas Aquinas, in *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 236–38. Kilby responds by offering a deeply apophatic reading of Aquinas: “Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005): 414–27.

(45) I should clarify that I refer to the “received Kant,” the Kant of the textbooks, the Kant so enormously influential in so much subsequent philosophy

of religion and theology, e.g., Gordon Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). But for an alternative reading of Kant, one which tries to correct all-too-common and pernicious misreadings and which sees him as helpful to Christian theology, see Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist (eds.), *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); see further the symposium on Kant in *Philosophia Christi* 9 (2007), pp. 7–97 (with essays by Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs, Stephen R. Palmquist, Christophe Chalamet, John E. Hare, and Keith E. Yandell).

(46) Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Between the Pincers of Increased Diversity and Supposed Irrationality," in William J. Wainwright (ed.), *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture: A Discussion between Scholars in the AAR and the APA* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 13–20.

(47) Wolterstorff, "Between the Pincers," p. 20. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is It Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 1–18.

(48) LaCugna, "Philosophers and Theologians on the Trinity," p. 172.

(49) Fred Sanders, "The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Evangelical Theology," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47 (2005): 153–75 at p. 169.

(50) For sterling examples, see the work of Richard Cross and Jeffrey Brower, e.g., Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jeffrey E. Brower, "The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: A Reply to Wierenga," *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 295–303. To these names we could add those of, e.g., Brian Leftow, Scott MacDonald, Marilyn McCord Adams, Norman Kretzman, and Eleonore Stump.

(51) David Bentley Hart is representative of a growing number of patristic scholars who are convinced that the common notion that "East" is to be pitted against "West" in Trinitarian theology is simply wrong: "the notion that, from the patristic period to the present, the Trinitarian theologies of the Eastern and Western catholic traditions have obeyed contrary logics and have in consequence arrived at conclusions inimical each to the other – a particularly tedious, persistent, and pernicious falsehood – will no doubt fade away from a lack of documentary evidence" ("The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 541). Michel R. Barnes posits

the genesis of this reading (or at least of its influence) in the work of Theodore de Regnon (e.g., “De Regnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51–79). In her polemic against a “Social Trinitarian” reading of Gregory of Nyssa, Sarah Coakley notes that “it is ironic to find Lossky at points directly dependent on de Regnon on this issue, and Zizioulas on Prestige! To have the ‘West’ attacked by the ‘East’ on a reading of the Cappadocians that was ultimately spawned by a French Jesuit is a strange irony” (“Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction – Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 434).

(52) For helpful discussion of this see Michael C. Rea, “Introduction,” in Michael C. Rea and Oliver D. Crisp (eds.), *Analytic Theology: New Essays in Theological Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21–2.

(53) See R. R. Reno, “Theology's Continental Captivity,” *First Things* (April 2006), pp. 26–33.

(54) Jean-Luc Marion, “In the Name,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, in John D. Caputo and Scanlon (eds.),*God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 37, quoted inThomas A. Carlson, “Postmetaphysical Theology,” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 69.

(55) Sanders, “The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” p. 170.

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