

Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism: A Defense of the Logical Coherence of, A
Priori Motivation for, and a Particular Model Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity

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by

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Abstract

The doctrine posits that God is one being, but three persons. The orthodox parameters for affirming the Trinity are found in the early Ecumenical Creeds of Christendom, especially the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. Four primary affirmations emerge as a summary of the essential content of the doctrine: (ONE): There is one God; (THREE): The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons; (FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not); and (EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others. These four desiderata reveal a logical tension that must be alleviated to consistently uphold the doctrine. This dissertation argues that the doctrine of the Trinity is logically coherent and seeks to reconcile the tension between ONE and THREE by means of the Composition as Identity (CAI) thesis, and seeks to reconcile the tension between FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY by presenting as will-independent the generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The motivation for the doctrine comes from both *a posteriori* analysis of Christian Scriptures and creeds, and from *a priori* Perfect Being Theology. This dissertation presents an *a priori* argument for the Trinity based on the concept of love. If God is the Greatest Conceivable Being, it is argued that God must possess the great-making property of love to a maximal degree. It is argued that only a being who efficiently and essentially engages in all four aspects of love—self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared—is perfect, and that only a triune being can efficiently and essentially love maximally. This dissertation presents and defends a positive Social Trinitarian model of the Trinity which argues that God is identical to the Trinity, and that incorporates CAI and emphasizes the will-independent generation of the Son and Holy Spirit. Because the doctrine requires precision, recommended usage of key terms is also presented.

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Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most fascinating and intriguing notions in all of philosophy. Its study requires philosophical analysis, and it has prompted many fruitful scholarly debates over the last 20 centuries. The doctrine is significant to the study of philosophy of religion in general, and to the Christian faith in particular. This dissertation will defend the Trinity against the charge of logical incoherence, consider and defend *a priori* motivation for the Trinity, including the presentation of an *a priori* argument for the Trinity, and will defend a particular model of the Trinity as the best explication of the doctrine.

The traditionally accepted orthodox description of the Trinity is found in the early ecumenical creeds of the church, especially the Nicene and Athanasian creeds.

The Nicene Creed states:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father... We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. Who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. Amen.

The Athanasian Creed states:

Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. 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 of the Holy Spirit, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Spirit unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. 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. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian truth

to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is neither made, nor created, nor begotten. The Son is neither made, nor created; but begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeds from the Father (and the Son). So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as said earlier; we must worship the unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity.

This dissertation will follow Thomas Senor's summary of the traditional creedal affirmations:

Monotheism (ONE): There is one God.

Three Persons (THREE): The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

Father/Son/Holy Spirit Relationship (FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not).

Equality of the Persons: (EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.¹

These four affirmations which comprise the essential content of the doctrine involve a good deal of mystery, but the charge of outright incoherence is regularly levied against the Trinity. A significant tension exists between ONE and THREE and between FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY. How is it that three distinct divine persons are one God? How can the divine persons be equal if one of those persons is in some sense the source of the other two? Michael Martin alleges that the Trinity results in numerous logical contradictions.

In simple terms the incoherence can be understood as follows: There are three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet these three divine persons are supposed to be distinct from one another: the Father is not the Son, the Father is not the Holy Spirit, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. However, there is exactly one God. According to this doctrine, [1] Christ must be his own father and his own son. [2] The Holy Ghost is neither father nor son, but both. [3] The son was begotten by the father, but existed before he was begotten. [4] Christ is just as old

¹ Senor, Thomas. 2013. "The Doctrine of the Trinity is Coherent," in *Debating Christian Theism* (C. Meister, J. P. Moreland, K. Sweis, eds). Oxford University Press. 340.

as his father, and the father is just as young as his son. [5] The Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and Son, but he is the same age as the other two.²

Martin's conclusions are typical of the charge of logical incoherence lodged against the Trinity. 1 and 2 both allege contradictions based on identity. According to this line of reasoning, if there is exactly one God, and the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, then either there must be three Gods, which contradicts there being exactly one God (ONE), or the three persons are not actually distinct, which contradicts the Father not being the Son nor the Holy Spirit and the Son not being the Holy Spirit (THREE). 1 and 2 both opt for the latter horn of dilemma and draw the conclusion that the persons are not distinct, resulting in the supposed contradictions above.

3-5 allege contradictions based on claimed equality, despite an apparent hierarchy and inequitable ages. If the persons are coequal in eternity and if the Son is begotten by the Father and if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, then either the three persons have staggered ages since Martin holds that begetting and proceeding both assume coming into existence and a hierarchy, which contradicts (EQUALITY), or the persons are the same age, which contradicts the Son and the Holy Spirit being sourced by the Father (FATHERSOURCE). 3-5 opt for the former horn of dilemma and draw the conclusion that the persons cannot be equal, resulting in the claimed contradictions.

For the logical problem of the Trinity to succeed in demonstrating the actual incoherence of the doctrine, however, it must be the case that there is no (acceptable) way to reconcile ONE, THREE, FATHERSOURCE, and EQUALITY as a self-consistent set. There exists a rich

² Michael Martin presents this argument in his review of Hugo Meynell's book *Is Christianity True?* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994). See www.infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/meynell.html for Martin's full review.

history of trinitarian theorizing that seeks to provide such (acceptable) reconciliations. Some attempts resulted in unacceptable notions, however. The early church condemned those notions as heretical at the ecumenical councils. A central theme of the first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea (325 AD), was to establish appropriate parameters of trinitarian theorizing.

An important outcome of the church councils was the clarification of three great heresies to be avoided: Modalism, Tritheism, and Subordinationism. While it would be simple to escape the charge of incoherence by identifying the Father as the Son and Holy Spirit, similarly to identifying Superman as Clark Kent, this solution does not suffice as it merely indicates that one individual can merit multiple descriptions as he plays multiple roles in life. The claim that the “Father,” the “Son,” and the “Holy Spirit” are really one person revealing himself in three different roles, or modes, is the heresy of modalism. Nor does it suffice to claim that the distinctness of the persons is also a distinctness of being, for then the heresy of tritheism is affirmed. Nor does it suffice to place the persons in a hierarchy whereby the Father is ontologically superior to the Son and the Holy Spirit in virtue the Father generating them, since such a claim is the heresy of subordinationism.

The four essential summary desideratum of creedal commitments form the orthodox description of the Trinity and directly oppose heretical views. ONE stands in direct opposition to tritheism. THREE stands in direct opposition to modalism. EQUALITY stands in direct opposition to subordinationism. FATHERSOURCE affirms creedal commitment to the biblical data and supports THREE.

Any acceptable explication of the doctrine must satisfy all four of these creedal affirmations. An important starting point when addressing the charge of logical incoherence is to acknowledge the *prima facie* concern. The term “God” is ambiguous in the creeds. If the term

“God” is meant in the same sense in all creedal usages, then obvious contradiction abounds. The term “God” is not univocally employed, however. The minds that wrestled with the philosophical notions surrounding the Trinity and compiled the creeds were not incapable of noticing blatant contradictions. On the contrary, they were apt to engage in rigorous logical analysis. When the Athanasian Creed states that, “the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet they are not three Gods; but one God,” the term “God” is not univocal. “God” can mean “the Trinity” or refer to a single divine person. Affirming “one God” affirms that there is only one Trinity of divine persons. Only one of the Trinity of divine persons is the Father and only one is the Son and only one is the Holy Spirit. Affirming “the Father is God” affirms that that Father is one of the divine persons of the Trinity. Linguistic ambiguity provides the leeway to blunt the charge of contradiction, but what positive explanation can be given to reconcile the four essential creedal affirmations?

The offering of analogies for the Trinity has long accompanied attempted explanations of the doctrine. In fact, analogies often play an important role in the proposed models of trinitarian theorizing. Of course, all analogies are inadequate when describing God, and all analogies of the Trinity break down if pressed too hard. Yet, they regularly attend intellectual understanding of the creedal affirmations.

Two main types of analogy have been offered historically: the psychological type and the social type. According to the psychological type, famously employed by Augustine, the three divine persons are compared to various faculties of the human mind or soul. Augustine’s primary example notes that the memory, the understanding, and the will, though distinct faculties, form one, indivisible psyche. The social analogy is traced back at least as far as Tertullian, and famously was employed by the Cappadocian Fathers. According to social type,

the three divine persons are comparable to three human persons. It may best be illustrated by a father, mother, and child who, while being three individuals, form one family, or by three human men, who are all distinct individuals, but can comprise a single committee. Although both types of analogy have their uses, both can be misleading, even heretical, if over-pressed.

Psychological analogies can suggest modalism. Social analogies can suggest tritheism. No trinitarian analogy adequately represents God. Each is a description that must be qualified in various ways if it is to provide conceptual clarity for the doctrine.

Other recent analogies importantly differ from these ancient offerings by escaping the bounds of psychological or social descriptions. William Lane Craig proposes making sense of four creedal affirmations by understanding God as a single being or soul who supports three centers of consciousness—the three divine persons. He offers an analogy in the form of Cerberus, the mythical three-headed guard dog of Hades. According to this analogy, Cerberus is a single dog with three heads and thus three brains: Spike, Bowser, and Rover. The reason that Spike, Bowser, and Rover are all identified as a single dog is obvious: they share a body. This allows Hercules to state with equal accuracy to one friend, “Spike bit me” and to another friend, “Cerberus bit me.” But suppose Hercules stabs and kills Cerberus. It seems that the now disembodied Spike, Bowser, and Rover could still exist as a single entity by virtue of sharing a soul. God, likewise, could exist as a single being, but with three centers of consciousness.

Jeremy S. Begbie provides an analogy, not from a philosophical background, but from a theological and musical background. A musical chord is essentially composed of three different notes—the first, third and fifth notes of a given musical scale. For example, the chord of C major is composed of the notes C (the root of the chord), E (the third from the root) and G (the fifth from the root). Each individual note is a “sound,” and all three notes played together are

likewise a “sound.” A musical chord is essentially three sounds in one sound, or one sound essentially composed of three different sounds (each of which has an individual identity as well as a corporate identity). When middle C (the root of the chord) is played, it “fills” the entire “heard space.” When the E above middle C is played at the same time, that second note simultaneously ‘fills’ the whole of the ‘heard space’; yet one can still hear both notes distinctly. When the G above middle C is added as well, a complete chord exists; one sound composed of three distinct sounds. Begbie conceives of God, similarly, as three divine persons in one divine tri-personal being, or one divine personal being essentially composed of three divine persons.

What could be more apt than to speak of the Trinity as a three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger, each occupying the same ‘space,’ yet recognizably and irreducibly distinct, mutually enhancing and establishing each other?³

Senor proposes thinking of the Trinity as a single particular divine nature that is multileveled, but necessarily and deeply interdependent. The fundamental level is the Father, the second the Son, and the third the Holy Spirit, making the Father the ontological ground of the others, even though Senor stresses that such a multileveled understanding does not imply that the Father creates the Son or Holy Spirit since their production is “will-independent.” Senor’s offered analogy is that of emergentism. According to this view:

[H]uman beings are biological entities composed only of parts that are the province of the natural sciences. Yet in another sense people can’t be reduced to their biological properties because their material parts give rise to an emergent mind that has causal powers that are more than the sum of its material parts. So, suppose the truth about human mentality is this: (1) the brain is the only ontological/causal source of human thought and action; (2) the mind is the product of the causal activity of the brain; (3) the mind is emergent, and this implies that the causal powers of the mind are not identical with the causal powers of the brain—the mind has powers that depend on the brain but that are distinct from it. Given the emergence of the nonepiphenomenal mind, there will be events that are causal products of the mind. Suppose such a mind freely decides

³ Jeremy Begbie (ed.), *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*, (Baker, 2000), p. 140.

to go see the Cubs play the Cardinals. The causal history of this decision includes the causal activity of the emergent mind that produces the decision to go the Cubs-Cardinals game as opposed to the going to see a local production of Macbeth happening the same night. All three of these entities (the brain, the mind, the decision) are aspects of a single unified person.⁴

Craig, Begbie, and Senor offer analogies that are different from those proposed throughout the history of trinitarian theorizing as important conceptual aids to their trinitarian models. More detailed treatments of Craig's and Senor's models will follow. Understanding the essential content to affirm and the heretical notions to avoid, along with a recognition of the ambiguous nature of creedal language, allows for appropriate, contradiction-free explications of the doctrine of the Trinity. Analogies, historical and contemporary, help philosophers to conceptualize the Trinity in coherent ways, but the heavy intellectual machinery in all acceptable trinitarian theorizing is in the models of the Trinity.

Traditionally, two broad approaches are taken when advancing defensible models of the Trinity. The starting point for these approaches is to emphasize either ONE or THREE. The first approach is typically identified as Social Trinitarianism, which places greater emphasis on the diversity of the divine persons. The second approach is identified as Latin Trinitarianism or as Anti-Social Trinitarianism, which stresses the unity of God. It is somewhat misleading to refer to the approach which stresses the unity of God as "Latin" since important Latin speaking church fathers Tertullian, Hilary, and Athanasius were each Social Trinitarians. The starting point for Social Trinitarianism is the distinct self-consciousness, intellect, and will of each divine person. The three persons each possess the generic divine nature as an attribute and are thus each fully divine. The persons are robustly distinct, constituting a genuine "others." This means that God is like a community but in virtue of *perichoresis* (the interpermeation or mutual

⁴ Senor, 344.

indwelling of the persons) is not an actual community, which would constitute tritheism. The starting point of Anti-Social Trinitarianism is that there is only one God whose intellect and will is composed by the diversity of persons, but there is only one divine substance. On this view, the persons are not robust—the persons are not three centers of consciousness, intellect, and will. God is not like a community at all.

Within both approaches, the unity of God has traditionally been expressed by the Greek word *ousia* (substance or essence) or its Latin equivalent *substantia*, both of which are usually translated into English with the word “substance.” The doctrine states that persons of the Trinity have one substance, or essential divine nature. The distinctiveness of the divine persons has traditionally been expressed by the Cappadocian Fathers with the Greek word *hypostasis* and by the Latin fathers with the Latin word *persona*. So the Trinity has been described in the East by the phrase, “three hypostases in one ousia,” and in Latin Christianity by the phrase, “three persons in one substance.” Both groups of Christians agree that there are three persons in the Trinity and that the Trinity is one God.

Anti-Social Trinitarians typically follow Latin-speaking theologians like Augustine and Aquinas. Augustine is frequently interpreted as arguing that the persons of the Trinity are various relations subsisting in God. Augustine claims that the distinction between Father and Son is a matter neither of different essential properties nor of different accidental properties, but that the persons are distinguished in virtue of the relations in which they stand. Because “Father” and “Son” are relational terms implying the existence of something else, Augustine thinks that properties like “begotten by God” cannot belong to anything’s essence since only intrinsic properties constitute something’s essence. But if being begotten is not part of the Son’s essence, is it accidental to Him? Augustine, says No, for it is eternally and immutably the case

for the Son to be begotten. But it could still be possible that there are possible worlds in which the person who is, in the actual world, the Father, does not beget a Son and so is not a Father.

Augustine could instead claim that “Father” and “Son” imply internal relations between the persons of the Godhead, so that there is no possible world in which they do not stand in that relation. The Father and Son would share the same intrinsic essential properties, but they would differ in virtue of their differing relational properties or the different internal relations in which they stand. Augustine importantly does not say that the Father and Son just merely are relations. Augustine seems uneasy about the phrase “three persons” because this implies three instances of a generic type and, hence, seems to imply three Gods (*De Trinitate* 5.9.10; 7.4.7-8).

Thomas Aquinas advances the Augustinian analogy. 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). In the mind is the mind itself, the mind conceived in the intellect, and the mind beloved in the will. According to Aquinas, since God knows Himself, there is in God the one who knows and the one who is known. The one known exists in the one knowing as His Word. They share the same essence, but they are relationally distinct (4.11.13). Aquinas holds that the different divine persons just are the different relations in God—being father of and being son of (*Summa Theologiae* 1a.40.2). Since the one knowing generates the one known and they share the same essence, they are related as Father to Son. Since God loves Himself, God as beloved is relationally distinct from God as loving (4.19.7-12) and is called the Holy Spirit.

Contemporary Anti-Social Trinitarians offer different models, but still emphasize the unity of God and still seek to avoid modalism. Brian Leftow offers what he calls Divine Life Stream Trinitarianism.⁵ According to this model, God eternally lives his life in three streams.

⁵ Leftow, Brian. “A Latin Trinity”, *Faith and Philosophy*, 21(3): 304–33. 2004.

Each stream constitutes a person and God lives his life-streams which are united by their being causally connected in the right way—the lives of each of three persons count as being streams of the life of God in the same way that a time traveling dancer may repeatedly travel back in time to dance on the stage, resulting in a whole company of dancers.

Leftow holds that if time travel is possible, a self/being may have multiple instances at a given time. His theory is that the Trinity is like this, but without the time dimension. God, in timeless eternity, lives out three life-streams. In one life-stream, God is the Father, in another the Son, and in another the Holy Spirit. These three life-streams ostensibly are all lived by one self, one God, three times repeated. It is unclear that this constitutes three distinct persons.

Leftow rebuffs the charge of modalism by noting that “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.”⁶ Leftow argues that terms like “Father” or “Son” are temporally non-rigid, so they only refer to God during that particular life-stream. “Father” refers to the God who is in a life-stream unbegotten and “Son” refers to the God who is in a life-stream begotten. It is unsettled whether these life streams still collapse into one person (modalism) since they are all lived by the (numerically) same self.

Social Trinitarian models began with the Cappadocian Fathers, including Basil the Great (330-379), Gregory of Nyssa (330-395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389). They explained the difference between substance and essence as the difference between a generic essence, say man, and particular exemplifications of it, say Andrew, Simon, and Paul. This leads to an obvious question: if Andrew, Simon, and Paul are three men each having the same nature, then

⁶ Ibid, 327.

why would not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit similarly be three Gods each exemplifying the divine nature?

Gregory of Nyssa sought to answer this question and emphasized the primacy of the universal nature, which is one and unchangeable in each of the three men. He advises speaking of one man, rather than speaking of three Gods. But the problem remains. Even if the universal is primary reality, there are still three exemplifications of that reality in three distinct beings/men. They are distinct beings/men since one of the men could cease to exist without the others ceasing to exist. Likewise, even if the single divine nature is the primary reality, it is apparently exemplified by three hypostases, each of whom seem to be an instance of deity—three Gods.

Gregory seeks to avoid this implication by positing the ineffability of the divine nature and that the operations of the Trinity toward creation involve the necessary participation of all three persons, whereby each operation originates in the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is perfected by the Holy Spirit. Even if this is so, it may well be the case that the operations are done by three cooperatively acting individuals who each exemplify the divine nature. The most pressing task of contemporary Social Trinitarians is to find a more convincing answer to why, in their view, there are not three Gods.

Numerous contemporary Social Trinitarian models attempt to strengthen the ancient view. Peter van Inwagen offers a Relative Identity model, whereby identity is always relative to a sortal, or kind.⁷ The proper way to speak about identity is not with statements such as “Superman is Clark Kent,” but with statements such as “Superman is *the same person* as Clark Kent.” The reason for this is that a pair might be identical relative to one sortal, but non-

⁷ van Inwagen, Peter. “And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God”, in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 222–59. 1995.

identical to another sortal. According to this model, the Father is the same *being* as the Son, but not the same *person* as the Son. So there is exactly one God; there are exactly three divine persons; there are three divine Persons in one divine Being. Relative identity is widely rejected as superfluous since Superman is a person, Clark Kent is a person, and Superman = Clark Kent, where “=” expresses classical identity, so there will not be a case where two items are identical relative to one sortal but not to another. It is not clear that relative identity helps explicate the Trinity.

Richard Swinburne offers a Functional Monotheism model.⁸ He argues that the creedal claim “there is only one God” is not asserting that there is only one divine individual, as that would contradict the creedal commitment to there being three divine individuals. He suggests that the creeds should be read as “denying that there were three independent divine beings, any one of which could exist without the other; or which could act independently of each other.”⁹ As a collective, these three beings function as a single God. While Swinburne’s account is provocative, it seems that despite a high degree of unified function, there still exists three divine beings, which is tritheism.

Another Social Trinitarian model offered by William Lane Craig is called Trinity Monotheism.¹⁰ This model argues:

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

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

⁹ *Ibid*, 180.

¹⁰ Craig, William Lane, and Moreland, J.P. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. 2017. P. 592-93.

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.”¹¹

Trinity Monotheism has many attractive features, but can be strengthened in light of particular objections raised against it. A fuller analysis, evaluation, and reformulation of Trinity Monotheism will follow.

The charge of logical incoherence raised against the doctrine of the Trinity can be answered, and a tenable model of the Trinity can be defended. While the creedal affirmations detail the orthodox understanding of the doctrine, such *a posteriori* sources are not the only motivation for belief in the Trinity. On the contrary, it is possible to believe in the necessity of the Trinity on *a priori* grounds. Such an argument, based on the Anselmian notion of God as the greatest conceivable being, and based on the nature of love, will follow.

Part I—The Logical Coherence of the Trinity

Section I—Common Language as an Opening Move to Understanding the Trinity

The traditional understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is summed up with the following four statements of creedal orthodoxy:

ONE: There is one God.

THREE: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

FATHERSOURCE: The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not).

EQUALITY: The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

¹¹ Ibid, 594.

These four affirmations which comprise the essential content of the doctrine of the Trinity possess mystery, to be sure, in how the natural tension between ONE and THREE and between FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY is best explained. Tension, to some, gives way to the charge of outright incoherence concerning the two pairs of statements. How is it that three distinct divine persons are one God? How can the divine persons be equal if one of those persons is in some sense the source of the other two? These questions are central to the majority of the critiques raised against the logical coherence of the doctrine. This section, along with the next two sections, will address the tension between ONE and THREE and the final section of this part will address the tension between FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY.

When the charge of logical incoherence is levied against a doctrine, there are two primary methods to employ in response. The first is to show that the very conceptual nature of two supposedly contradictory statements are, in fact, not contradictory. This will involve an exploration of the statements in their context and an exploration of possible readings for each. This method looks for general and conceptual coherence between two affirmations, but does not present a particular model of the doctrine itself. The second method is to demonstrate the coherence of two affirmations by presenting a model of the doctrine that positively unifies them. The advantage to the second method is that logical coherence is assured if an actual model can be defended. The potential pitfall to the second method is that if there are reasons, independent of logical incoherence, to reject the model, the incoherence charge can once again be lobbed at the doctrine. The advantage to the first method is that a variety of particular models can later be considered so long as they make use of the conceptual and general understanding needed to alleviate potential incoherence. The disadvantage of the first method is that it leaves the doctrine somewhat underdetermined—a model consistent with the conceptual and general understanding

will need to be presented as a positive demonstration of the doctrine fully fleshed out before wholesale endorsement of the Trinity is warranted.

In addressing the coherence of ONE and THREE the first method will be employed with a particular trinitarian model presented later. In addressing FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY the second method will be employed and the model presented there in rough sketch will be explored more fully later. The reason for use of the first method concerning ONE and THREE is that the majority of arguments against the logical coherence of the doctrine highlight the tension between them. If these two affirmations are generally compossible conceptually, then all of the arguments alleging logical incoherence based on them can be addressed simultaneously.

Consider ONE and THREE. Einar Bohn follows an interpretation of the Athanasian Creed that begins with the following set of propositions¹²:

1. God = the Father
2. God = the Son
3. God = the Holy Spirit
4. The Father \neq the Son
5. The Father \neq the Holy Spirit
6. The Holy Spirit \neq the Son

Bohn explains that this set “is inconsistent in the sense that it leads to paradox in virtue of the classical logic of identity.”¹³ This logic of identity is given by the following two axioms:

7. For any x and y, if $x = y$, then x and y share all properties
8. For any x, $x = x$

From which one can trivially prove the following two theorems:

9. For any x and y, if $x = y$, then $y = x$
10. For any x, y, and z, if $x = y$ and $y = z$, then $x = z$

¹² Brower, J. E., & Rea, M. “Understanding the Trinity” in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, Vol. 8. 145–157. 2005.

¹³ Einar Duenger Bohn. “The Logic of Trinity” in *Sophia*. Vol. 50. 2011. P. 365.

This implies what Bohn calls the *Trinitarian Paradox*: by propositions 1 and 9 it immediately follows that

11. The Father = God

By propositions 11, 2, and 10 it immediately follows that

12. The Father = the Son

The conjunction of propositions 12 and 4 is a direct contradiction. Such a contradiction, unless able to be resolved, demonstrates that the propositions under consideration form an illogical set and either the interpretation of the creedal data must be altered or else the doctrine of the Trinity itself must be jettisoned to the illogical/contradictory philosophical scrap heap.

With no further restrictions on one's concept of God, the paradox might be taken to have the trivial polytheistic solution that there are in fact three gods, not one. But remember that an orthodox solution must adhere to the four essential summary desideratum of the creedal statements describing the Trinity:

ONE: There is one God.

THREE: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

FATHERSOURCE: The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not).

EQUALITY: The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

The Athanasian Creed notes that the Christian must “worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity,” and according to which “yet there are not three Gods, but one God,” yielding another proposition:

13. There is one and only one God

Any solution to the Trinitarian Paradox must be compatible with 13 in order not to violate orthodoxy. Proposition 13 seems to produce another paradox which Bohn calls the *Paradox of the Cardinals*: by 1–6 “it follows that God is (at least) three in number, namely the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each being distinct from each other. But by 13, God is one in number, not three. Hence, God is one in number and God is not one in number.”¹⁴ These two paradoxes form the heart of the charge of logical incoherence raised against the doctrine of the Trinity.

Consider first the Paradox of Cardinals. Bohn employs referential counting¹⁵ but does not label it as such. Instead, he opts to describe the procedure not in logical terminology, but as primitive, pointing to the very common practice among non-logicians.

Consider my body. Referring to it, one might say with equal truth both that it is a body and that it is two arms, two legs, one head and a torso. In so doing one isn't referring to two distinct referents, or portions of reality, but rather to one and the same portion of reality divided up in two different ways. One such way is as one body, while the other is as two arms, two legs, one head, and a torso. Or, as Quine (1960:91) puts it with another, but similar example: 'shoes' and 'pair of shoes' range over exactly the same scattered stuff, and differ from one another solely in that they divide their reference differently. The important point for our purposes isn't exactly how we manage to divide one and the same portion of reality in two (or more) different ways, but rather that we in fact do so all the time. And we obviously do. For example, we say things like: *The team was awesome today! They played amazingly well.* And: *that (one) kilometer is a thousand meters.* And: *my body just is those particles arranged body-wise.* What's happened in such cases is that on the one hand we have referred to one thing, while in the next breath referred to that very thing *as a plurality of things* instead. No one should claim that in such cases we *must always* switch referent from first be talking about some one thing to then be talking about some many things, which aren't the same portion of reality as the one thing. That would be incredible. Rather, one should claim that what has happened is just that there is a switch between the *way we thought of, or conceptualized* one and the same portion of reality, not in what portion of reality we referred to.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Relative counting maintains that a person cannot determine how many things there are until she has been given a *sortal* (a concept or kind) under which to count by.

¹⁶ Bohn, "Logic of the Trinity." 366.

Bohn follows a distinguished list of thinkers, who can both logically analyze identity in singular/plural hybrid terms, but can also employ very common usage of the practice. Gottlob

Frege provides another example:

While looking at one and the same external phenomenon, I can say with equal truth both “It is a copse” and “It is five trees”, or both “Here are four companies” and “Here are 500 men”. Now what changes here from one judgment to the other is neither any individual object, nor the whole, the agglomeration of them, but rather my terminology. But that is itself only a sign that one concept has been substituted for another.¹⁷

Thomas Aquinas contends that:

A single real (geometrical) point may truly correspond to several conceptions we frame of it: conceived of in itself, conceived of as a (circle’s) centre, conceived of as the end of a line. All these conceptions are in the mind as subject, yet in the point itself as giving a basis to the truth of the conceptions.¹⁸

It is also how Rene Descartes thinks of the relation between corporeal substances and regions of space: “There is no real distinction between space, or internal place, and the corporeal substance contained in it; the only difference lies in the way in which we are accustomed to conceive of them.”¹⁹

The implication of variously numerically conceiving of the same portion of reality is that it seems that numerical properties are *relational* properties. A portion of reality’s numerical property (cardinality) depends on how it is conceptualized. When conceptualizing some portion of reality as two arms, two legs, one head, and a torso, it has the numerical property “six” holding true of it, but when conceptualizing the same portion of reality as a body, it has the

¹⁷ Frege, Gottlob. *The Foundations of Arithmetic: A Logico-Mathematical Enquiry into the Concept of Number*. J. L. Austin, Trans. Blackwell Publishing. 1980. §59.

¹⁸ Aquinas (1253-55). *Selected Philosophical Writings*. T. McDermott, Ed. Oxford Press, 1993. P. 240.

¹⁹ Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. I*. Cottingham et al., Trans. Cambridge University Press. 1985. P. 227.

numerical property “one” holding true of it. It seems that independently of being conceptualized, a certain portion of reality has no particular numerical property holding true of it at all. Bohn continues:

Likewise with God: conceptualizing the portion of reality that is God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we have conceptualized it as being three in number, but it is nonetheless the same portion of reality as what we might conceptualize as God, and hence as being one in number. Numerical properties aren't properties holding of it independently of how it is being conceptualized. This is of course not saying that one conceptualization cannot be better somehow than another, nor that they cannot be equally good. It is only saying that, better, worse, or equal, it is a conceptualization of one and the same portion of reality either way.²⁰

This understanding solves the Paradox of the Cardinals since it is not the case that God is one in number and that God is not one in number, *simpliciter*. Rather, it is the case that God is one in number *relative* to one way of conceptualizing that portion of reality that God is, and not one in number *relative* to another way of conceptualizing that same portion of reality. This seems to be what ONE and THREE demand. Such an understanding of ONE and THREE can be described using the logical form: One(x,y) & not-One(x,z), which is not a contradiction since ‘x’ ranges over portions of reality and ‘y’ and ‘z’ ranges over the concepts ‘God’ and ‘Father, Son, Holy Spirit’, respectively. Merely absolving the numerical paradox, however, does not show the doctrine of the Trinity to be logically consistent.

Next, consider the Trinitarian Paradox. Propositions 1–3 can collapse into the following proposition:

14. God = the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

‘God’ is a singular term, and ‘the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit’ is a plural term, both referring to the same portion of reality, just conceptualized differently. It is important to read ‘=’

²⁰ Bohn, “Logic of the Trinity”. 366.

collectively, not distributively. That is to say, God is identical with neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit, but to say that God is identical with all of them taken together. God = the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit *collectively*. This distinction between a collective and a distributive reading of predicates is common in natural languages as well as in standard plural logic.²¹

Bohn provides the following example to clarify the collective/distributive divide:

Consider three things a, b, and c surrounding one thing x. It is then true that a,b,c taken together or collectively surround x, but not true that a surrounds x, and it is not true that b surrounds x, and it is not true that c surrounds x. To solve the Trinitarian Paradox, we simply treat identity like that; hence, the collective reading of proposition.²²

Such an understanding seems to be what creedal orthodoxy demands. Note the pattern in the Athanasian Creed:

Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Spirit unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternal; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty; but one Almighty. 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.

The creed repeats the predicative form *The Father is G, the Son is G, and the Holy Spirit is G. And yet they are not three Gs, but one G*, where G is uncreated, unlimited, eternal, Almighty, and God, respectively. Since the predicative pattern is clear in the first four cases, it seems inconsistent to read the last case, according to which each of three persons are God, as being a case of numerical identity. Following the clear predicative pattern, it seems most

²¹ Yi, Beyong-Uk. "The Logic and Meaning of Plurals. Part I." *Journal of Philosophical Logic*. Vol. 34, 2005 459–506.

²² Bohn, "Logic of the Trinity". 367.

consistent to read the last instance as being a case of the *is of predication*, rather than the *is of identity*. The properties ‘uncreated,’ ‘unlimited,’ ‘eternal,’ and ‘Almighty’ are each predicated to each of the persons such that the persons collectively share in them, not that each person is a separate instance of them. The reason why there are not three uncreated, nor three infinites, nor three eternals, nor three Almighties is because the persons collectively *are* one singular being. Since each person is a part of the one being, each person has those properties predicated of each of them. The pattern, likewise, holds with the term ‘God.’ Each person is God in virtue of being a part of the one being who is God. The very next sentence of the creed seems to demand such an interpretation to avoid contradiction: “And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.” Saying that each person is God is not a sudden shift to the use of the *is of identity*. Saying that each person is God is the next usage of the *is of predication*, just as it was similarly employed for the previous four predicated attributes. Claiming that the creed suddenly shifts its use of ‘is’ misinterprets the clear predicative pattern the creed employs. Each person is a part of ‘God.’ It is not the case that each person distributively/individually is numerically identical to ‘God.’

This solution to the Trinitarian Paradox avoids contradiction among the following set of propositions:

14. God = the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit (collectively)
15. (restatement of 4). The Father \neq the Son
16. (restatement of 5). The Father \neq the Holy Spirit
17. (restatement of 6). The Holy Spirit \neq the Son

This is a consistent set of propositions that adheres to the classical laws of identity as long as proposition 14 is read collectively, not distributively. This set of propositions is consistent with the creedal summary statements ONE and THREE. It is when conceptualized as *God* that *He* is one, undivided in substance. It is when conceptualized as *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit* that *the Persons* are three, not confounded with each other.

The logical problem involving the Trinity is to explain how the creedal summary statements are logically consistent. A powerful opening move to addressing the logical problem of the Trinity is to identify the one and only God with the three persons collectively, thus noting the two different ways of conceptualizing the same portion of reality. By doing so, the trinitarian neither takes his starting point in God nor in the three persons. The battle over whether Latin Trinitarian models or Social Trinitarian models provide the best explanation of the creedal summary statements will be decided when one endorses a particular trinitarian model.

Addressing the logical problem by noting that the one God *is identical with* the three persons (collectively), and that the three persons (collectively) *are identical with* the one God is a non-contradictory way to demonstrate consistency between ONE and THREE. Demonstrations of this sort align with common sense and ordinary language use.

Of course, such a move is not merely the purview of ordinary language and pre-theoretic common sense. Recall the passages mentioned above from Aquinas, Descartes, Frege, and Quine. Because of their controversial nature, numerically hybrid identity claims occupy a space in high-level metaphysical and logical theory. Claiming that identity is a one-one relation that anything bears to itself and to nothing else, but that this account employs a one-many/many-one relation, and thus that this account is flawed, does not demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity is illogical. A deeper analysis of plural identity claims is needed and is the content of the following section. The account described heretofore has deliberately steered away from the philosophical understanding of the mereological notions of composition, parthood, proper parthood, etc., establishing the primitive notion of plural identity before forging into an analysis of composition as identity. Such a move is consistent with how a non-logician would describe the notion of the Trinity.

Section II—Composition as Identity—a Philosophical Second Move Conceived

If God is triune as traditional Christian theism supposes, then it stands to reason that God is necessarily triune. If God is necessarily triune, then God just is the Trinity and God cannot be other than the Trinity. If God just is the Trinity, then some sort of composition is at play. The Trinity composes God and God is composed by the Trinity. An oft maligned notion within metaphysics is the Composition as Identity (CAI) thesis which claims that the composition relation *is* the identity relation. Such a position strikes some as obvious and others as obviously false. What is clear is that identity and composition are highly complex notions.

Composition as Identity is an important thesis to use in understanding the logical coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity.²³ Is CAI itself consistent? What are the issues that play into accepting or rejecting CAI? It is best to wade into shallow waters when beginning an analysis of these issues.

Consider ordinary objects, such as tables and mallets. Often ordinary objects have parts. Mallets, for example, have a handle and a head as parts. The simple analysis that ordinary objects have parts opens the door to a variety of philosophical issues. Suppose the mallet in question is comprised of only two parts—the handle and the head—and is the only physical object in the world. How many physical objects are there in this world? Some may be inclined to say *one* as there is just one mallet. But the mallet is composed of a handle and a head. So it seems that the handle and head must be counted, too. Does this mean there are *three* things? Three does not seem right. There is one mallet, which is comprised to two parts (a handle and a head), but to say that three things exist seems to count something twice.

²³ Klindschmidt (“Many-One Identity and the Trinity” in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 4. 2012) disagrees, but will be addressed in later sections.

If one believes the mallet is a distinct thing from the handle and the head, thus rejecting Composition as Identity, then one is committed to co-located objects. The mallet is a material object that occupies region, *R*. The handle and the head are material objects that also occupy region *R*. This is an example of compete spatial overlap. There is no place that the mallet is and the handle and head are not, and there is no place that the handle and the head are that the mallet is not. Complete spatial co-location is a bizarre philosophical commitment, and it may be the case that handle and the head are not actually distinct from the mallet. If this is so, some may be inclined to say there are only *two* objects in this world—the handle and the head. But then what happened to the mallet? This seemingly simple world containing an ordinary object and its parts looks more complicated than initially thought. It is unclear even how many objects there are without first taking stock of important philosophical notions.

Does the notion of complete spatial overlap hold true for all cases of material composition, that is, to all ordinary objects and their parts? What about the co-location of wholes and parts? Can some objects compose another object? Is composition ontologically innocent?²⁴ Do composite objects gain and lose parts over time? Can composite objects *possibly* gain or lose parts? Are composite objects causally redundant? These are questions that help philosophers develop notions of metaphysics that may be applicable to trinitarian

²⁴ David Lewis (*Parts of Classes*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. P. 81.) believes so, but certain varieties of CAI do not appear to be innocent. Innocence is pronounced up versions of CAI that restrict wholes from being “nothing over and above” the parts taken together, or fusions. Lewis says, “Given a prior commitment to casts, say a commitment to cat-fusions is not a *further* commitment. The fusion is nothing over and above the cats that compose it. It just *is* them. They just *are* it...the cats are the same portion of Reality either way...if you draw up an inventory of Reality according to your scheme of things, it would be double counting to list the cats and then also list their fusion.”

theorizing. One of the most vital notions to consider as possibly applicable to trinitarian theorizing is that of Composition as Identity.

Composition as Identity is the view that the composition relation *is* the identity relation.²⁵

Bohn defines Composition as Identity as “the thesis that a whole and all its parts collectively is the same thing under two different modes of presentation.”²⁶ One of the alleged virtues of the thesis is that it entails unrestricted composition, which Bohn defines as the

²⁵ There are various ways to understand Composition as Identity. Lewis rejects the above definition of CAI. His endorsement of Weak Composition as Identity Theory (WCT), as opposed to Strong Composition as Identity defined above, commits him to the claim that composition is only analogous to identity. WCT claims that composition does not obey Leibniz’s Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals (Lewis 1991: 87). Megan Wallace believes that this gets Lewis out of all of the arguments based on Leibniz’s Law, but it does so at the “cost of blatant false advertising: if composition does not obey the Indiscernibility of Identicals, then despite what other redeeming features such a relation has, composition is simply not identity. Claiming that a relation is very similar to but not identity entails that such a relation is not identity. And if composition is not identity then it is a mystery how it reaps the theoretical benefits of CAI” (Wallace, Megan. “Composition as Identity Part 1” in *Philosophy Compass*. Vol. 6. No. 11. 2011. P. 809.)

Donald Baxter (“Identity, Discernibility, and Composition,” in A. J. Cotnoir and Donald L.M. Baxter, eds. *Composition as Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.) endorses a radical view of Composition as Identity, which rejects the Indiscernibility of Identicals, which also allows him to escape from arguments against Composition as identity based on Leibniz’s Law. If Composition as Identity requires giving up well-entrenched principles of identity, then it seems that Composition as Identity should be abandoned, not well-entrenched principles of identity.

Here is a formalized definition of CAI which can describe CAI in terms of a definition of identity: (CAI): $xxCy =_{df} xx=y$, but some (Sider 2007) prefer to formulate CAI in terms of the material biconditional: (CAI*): $xxCy \leftrightarrow xx=y$. But opting for a biconditional formulation seems too weak. Bohn notes, “For all CAI* says, it could be the case that ‘C’ and ‘=’ express two distinct relations that just happens to be such that their extensions overlap, but which might, in other possible worlds, fail to be thus related. We thus open up all the room for doubt about composition really being a relation of identity. Merely necessitating CAI* doesn’t seem to fully resolve the worry of the two relations being distinct. I therefore prefer the stronger formulation in terms of a definition. This way there is no room for doubt as to whether ‘C’ and ‘=’ express the same relation” (‘Unrestricted Composition as Identity’ in *Composition as Identity*, Donald Baxter and Aaron Cotnoir (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2014. P.144).

²⁶ Bohn, E. “Unrestricted Composition as Identity” in *Composition as Identity*, eds. D. Baxter & A. Cotnoir, Oxford University Press 2014. P. 143.

thesis that any plurality of things composes something: the composed is the same thing as the composers so if the composers exist, *ipso facto* so does the composed. This provides us with a lot more entities that can play the role of denotation for our ordinary and theoretical terms, and so at no extra ontological cost.”²⁷

There may be other virtues of CAI as well. Megan Wallace contends that “if composition is identity, there will be no co-location problem of parts and wholes.”²⁸ There may be a mallet occupying region *R*, and there may be a handle and head occupying region *R*, but this is not a problem for CAI because the parts taken collectively (the handle and the head) are identical to the whole (the mallet). Wallace continues, “Co-location of parts and wholes is no more of a problem on this view than co-location is a problem for Superman and Clark Kent—the object(s) under discussion are identical, so there are no distinct objects to *co-locate*.”²⁹

Composition as Identity is far from a straightforward position, however. Trenton Merricks³⁰ argues that composite objects produce rampant overdetermination if composition is not identity. Suppose a baseball causes a window to break and suppose that the baseball is composed of a right half and a left half. If composition is not identity, then it seems that both the baseball (as a whole) caused the window to break and the right and left half (collectively) cause the window to break. The difficulty about how many objects there are also exists when considering how many causes and effects there are. The difficulty dissolves if composition is identity. Overdetermination of a baseball and its parts is no more a problem than overdetermination is a problem for Superman and Clark Kent—the object(s) under discussion are identical, so there are no distinct objects to *over* determine anything.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wallace, Megan. “Composition as Identity Part 1” in *Philosophy Compass*. Vol. 6. No. 11. 2011. P. 805.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Merricks. Trenton. *Objects and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.

The advantages CAI provides, however, are purchased at too high a price according to CAI's critics. Harold Noonan and Ben Curtis identify three primary challenges to CAI.³¹ The first two present different syntactic difficulties while the last pits CAI against Leibniz's Law. The first challenge facing the CAI theorist is the syntactic problem that "hybrid identity statements are ungrammatical in English."³²

Consider the following statements: "Superman = Clark Kent" and "The hunters = the gatherers." Both of these identity statements are *well-formed* since the predicates on each side of the "=" share either singularity or plurality. The "=" represents *is identical with* when the value of that on each side of the "=" is singular (Superman/Clark Kent). The "=" represents *are identical with* when the value of that on each side of the "=" is plural (hunters/gatherers). The order of predicates does not matter so long as the value on each side of the "=" is equivalent. *Superman = Clark Kent* is equivalent to *Clark Kent = Superman*. The statement "the bricks = the wall" and its inverse "the wall = the bricks" seems not to be well formed since the "=" takes on the singular (*is identical with*) when the wall is on the left of the "=" and the "=" takes on the plural (*are identical with*) when the bricks are on the left of the "=" . English does not allow hybrid identity statements according to Peter van Inwagen.³³

Second is the semantic problem of providing coherent truth-conditions for hybrid identity statements. The standard way to provide the truth-conditions for the classical identity relation is to say that an identity statement of the form " $p=q$ " is true iff " p " and " q " have the same referents.

³¹ Noonan, Harold and Curtis, Ben. "Identity" on *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/identity>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Van Inwagen, Peter. "Composition as Identity" in *Philosophical Perspectives*. Vol. 8. 1994. P. 211.

But this account clearly does not work for hybrid identity statements since there are not singular referents for plural terms. Likewise, the standard way to provide the truth-conditions for plural identity statements does not work for hybrid identity statements either. Noonan and Curtis explain:

To say that “ x is one of the y s” is to say that x is (classically) identical with one of the things in the plurality, i.e., that x is identical with y_1 , or identical with y_2 ... or identical with y_n . But then “the bricks = the wall” is true only if the wall is (classically) identical with one of the bricks, i.e. with b_1 , or with b_2 ... or with b_n , which it isn’t.³⁴

The third challenge is “the most troublesome of all.”³⁵ The problem is that Leibniz’s Law (and its contrapositive) appears to be crucial to an appropriate understanding of identity and distinctness, but it seems that the CAI theorist must deny this. After all, the bricks are many, but the wall is one. “The onus is thus on the defender of strong Composition as Identity to explain why we should think the “are” in hybrid identity statements really expresses the relation of identity.”³⁶ The second and the third challenges are thought by those Noonan and Curtis reference to be “insurmountable.”³⁷

Most of the critiques against CAI will address one of these challenges in some way. If CAI cannot adequately address these challenges, then it is a non-starter for explaining the logical coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity. How is a CAI theorist to respond to these challenges?

RESPONSE TO FIRST CHALLENGE:

The first challenge is that hybrid identity statements are ungrammatical in English. Such a position is far from certain, however. Common usages of hybrid identity statements are

³⁴ Noonan & Curtis, “Identity.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

employed regularly in English.³⁸ Other languages such as Norwegian and Hungarian³⁹ make use of hybrid identity statements, so this challenge merely seems to call for what Noonan and Curtis refer to as “a mild form of grammatical revisionism.”⁴⁰ Philosophy also makes use of formal logical languages that do allow hybrid identity claims. More on hybrid identity statements will come in response to the second challenge.

RESPONSE TO SECOND CHALLENGE:

The second challenge is providing coherent truth-conditions for hybrid identity statements. Formal logical languages (in addition to Norwegian, Hungarian, and colloquial English) can make use of hybrid identity statements. Identity is the primitive relation everything bears to itself and to nothing else, uniquely characterized by the following two laws:

(R): $\forall\alpha(\alpha=\alpha)$	[Relation anything bears to itself]
(LLII): $\forall\alpha\forall\beta(\alpha=\beta\rightarrow\forall X(X\alpha\leftrightarrow X\beta))$	[Leibniz’s Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals]

In LLII ‘ α ’ and ‘ β ’ are first-order variables, and ‘ X ’ is a second-order variable ranging over (extensional) properties. Bohn explains how numerical hybrid identity statements follow:

Let ‘ $\alpha=\beta$ ’ be the form of our atomic (first-order) well-formed formula (wff) of identity, but with each one of ‘ α ’ and ‘ β ’ admitting values of any cardinality. Without this last admission, composition as identity is a non-starter. But with that assumption on board, we can isolate, or define, various sub-types of expressions of identity. For example, the instances in which both ‘ α ’ and ‘ β ’ take singular values we mark as the expressions of identity from classical first-order singular logic: $x=y$. The instances in which both ‘ α ’ and ‘ β ’ take plural values we mark as the expressions of identity from first-order plural logic: $xx=yy$. The instances in which ‘ α ’ takes a plural value and ‘ β ’ a singular value we mark as the expressions of what we might call *numerically hybrid identity*: $xx=y$.⁴¹

³⁸ See Bohn’s quote above. P. 18-19.

³⁹ Sider, Tomas. “Parthood” in *Philosophical Review* Vol. 116. P. 51-91.

⁴⁰ Noonan & Curtis, “Identity.”

⁴¹ Bohn, 2014. P. 144.

With numerically hybrid identity in place, a formalized definition of Composition as Identity can now be presented:

(CAI): $xxCy =_{df} xx=y$

where ‘C’ is the predicate expressing composition. So in this case xx taken collectively composes y and xx is identical to y . Of course, since identity is reflexive, y is identical to xx , but importantly, composition is *not* reflexive. Any formalized system must provide the appropriate restrictions to prevent arriving at $yCxx$ (read ‘ y composes xx ’) which is mereological nonsense. Identity is two-way, but composition is one-way. The composition relation, even though one-way, *is* the identity relation since xx collectively and y pick out the same portion of reality, but no plurality of objects can be composed of a singular object. CAI permits only substitutions of the following sort: ‘ $xx=y$ ’/‘ $y=xx$ ’ can be substituted for ‘ $xxCy$ ’ (xx compose y), but not for ‘ $yCxx$ ’ (y composes xx).

So what are the truth-conditions for hybrid identity statements? The standard way to provide the truth-conditions for the classical identity relation is to say that an identity statement of the form $\alpha=\beta$ is true iff ‘ α ’ and ‘ β ’ have the same referents. But hybrid identity statements of the form $xx=y$ must have different referents (since there are not plural referents for singular terms). Let ‘ v ’ be a primitive value assignment. Since ‘ $\alpha=\beta$ ’ is satisfied iff $v(\alpha)$ is identical with $v(\beta)$, ‘ $xx=y$ ’ is satisfied iff $v(xx)$ is identical with $v(y)$. CAI says that the truth-condition for ‘ $xxCy$ ’ is satisfied iff $v(xx)$ is identical with $v(y)$.

CAI allows for the definitions the rest of the mereological predicates as well.

Parthood: $x<y =_{df} \exists z(z<x \& z<y)$
 Proper Parthood: $x<<y =_{df} x<y \& x \neq y$
 Overlap: $xOy =_{df} \exists z(z<x \& z<y)$
 Disjointness: $xDy =_{df} \sim xOy$

Each of these mereological predicates is entailed by (CAI): $xxCy =_{df} xx=y$. Claiming that *the bricks = the wall* is true only if the wall is (classically) identical with one of the bricks, i.e. with b_1 , or with $b_2 \dots$ or with b_n , makes the critical error of understanding identity distributively, not collectively. CAI understands identity collectively and explains the truth-conditions for hybrid identity statements of the form ‘ $xx=y$ ’ as being satisfied iff xx (collectively) is identical with y .

Adopting a language that includes irreducibly plural terms, which refer to objects collectively, as opposed to only distributively, removes the bizarre need for the wall to be identical with any particular brick, which clearly it is not. Suppose that $o_1, o_2 \dots, o_n$ are the parts of a composite object O . A merely singular language construes identity distributively:
(Merely Singular Language reading) $o_1 = O \ \& \ o_2 = O \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ o_n = O$.

In contrast, CAI accepts the claim that the parts *taken collectively* are identical to the whole:

(CAI Plural Language reading) $o_1, o_2, \dots, o_n = O$

The CAI theorist can use ‘,’ as a way of concatenating singular terms, where, for example ‘ x,y ’ means ‘ x and y , *taken together*.’

RESPONSE to THIRD CHALLENGE:

The third challenge to CAI invokes Leibniz’s Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. Leibniz’s Law is a stalwart concept of philosophy and so any theory that violates it must either demonstrate that Leibniz’s Law is not applicable to it or the theory must be jettisoned. CAI states that the composition relation *is* the identity relation for all composite objects. A composite object O is identical to its parts $o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n$ collectively: ((CAI): $o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n$ Compose $O =_{df} o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n = O$.)

Leibniz's Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals (LLII) states for any object x and any object y, $x = y$, if any property P holds of x, then P must also hold of y and vice versa: (LLII):

$$\forall x \forall y (x = y \rightarrow \forall P (Px \leftrightarrow Py)).$$

Arguments against CAI based on LLII can (generally) be formalized as follows:

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. If CAI, then $o_1, o_2, o_3 \dots o_n = O$. | [CAI] |
| 2. If $o_1, o_2, o_3 \dots o_n = O$, then for any property P, $o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n$ have P if O has P. | [LLII] |
| 3. For some property R, either ($o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n$ have R and O does not) or
(O has R and $o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n$ do not). | [Premise] |
| 4. So, $o_1, o_2, o_3, \dots, o_n \neq O$. | [2, 3 MT] |
| 5. So, CAI is false. | [4, 1 MT] |

Arguments against CAI based on LLII are presented in various sorts, each differing importantly by how premise 3 is filled out. Most such arguments cash premise three out in terms of NUMBER, TEMPORAL, or MODAL presentations.

NUMBER: If CAI is true, then the parts are (strictly) identical to the whole. But if this is so, then by LLII, any property the parts have the whole must have as well. But the parts are many, while the whole is not. So, the parts are not identical to the whole. So, CAI is false.⁴²

For TEMPORAL and MODAL imagine some Lego bricks, scattered and in no particular order, at t_1 . At t_2 someone makes a Lego wall out of the Lego bricks, such that the Lego bricks compose the Lego wall at t_2 . Also imagine that Lego bricks can survive being scattered (after all, they are scattered and survive at t_1), but that the Lego wall cannot survive being scattered.

TEMPORAL: If CAI is true, then the Lego bricks are (strictly) identical to the Lego wall. But if this is so, then by LLII, any property the Lego bricks have the Lego wall must have as well. But the Lego bricks existed at time t_1 , while the Lego wall did not. So, the Lego bricks are not identical to the Lego wall. So, CAI is false.

⁴² Lewis presents just such an argument in Lewis (1991), as does McKay (McKay, T. *Plural Predication*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.

MODAL: If CAI is true, then the Lego bricks are (strictly) identical to the Lego wall. But if this is so, then by LLII, any property the Lego bricks have the Lego wall must have as well. But the Lego bricks could have survived being scattered, while the Lego wall could not. So, the Lego bricks are not identical to the Lego wall. So, CAI is false.

Are such arguments based on LLII decisive against CAI? The only rule of inference needed in each is *modus tollens*, which is classically valid. Each of the remaining premises is justified by definition, an accepted rule of identity, or by a seemingly obvious empirical claim. How should the CAI theorist respond to such arguments?

The CAI theorist can maintain that many of the arguments based on LLII above are invalid by noting that many of the arguments commit the formal fallacy of equivocation. The equivocation becomes clear after introducing plural language and after including numerically hybrid identity. In arguments that make no equivocation, a CAI theorist must seek to deny the truth of premise 3.

First consider objections of the NUMBER sort. Some might suspect that CAI is simply incoherent when considered in light of LLII. Assume a,b compose c. By CAI, $a,b=c$. By LLII, any property of a,b is then a property of c, and vice versa. But, (1) a,b has a cardinal property greater than one, which c does not; (2) a,b form a many-membered set, which c does not; and (3) a,b has the property of having b as one of them, which c does not. So, by virtue of LLII, CAI seems to be incoherent as a,b have properties that c does not.

What goes wrong for (1), (2), and (3) is that the mode of presentation, or concept under which the things of which predications are made, is not considered. No ordinary thing has a particular cardinality independent of how it is conceptualized. Frege demonstrates this powerfully in *The Foundations of Arithmetic* where he claims: “The Illiad, for example, can be

thought of as one poem, or as twenty-four Books, or as some large Number of verses; and a pile of cards can be thought of as one pack or as fifty-two cards.”⁴³ Frege concludes that cardinality is a property that “attaches to” concepts, not the things falling under those concepts. A person can hold one and the same thing in her hand and truly say of it that is one deck of cards, four suits of sets, but 52 cards. One and the same thing is thus one when thought under, or picked out by, the concept *deck of cards*, four when thought under, or picked out by, the concept *suits of sets*, but 52 when thought under, or picked out by, the concept *card*.

This process is called relative counting. Relative counting maintains that a person cannot determine how many things there are until she has been given a sortal (a concept or kind) under which to count by. Generally, there cannot be a unique numerical answer (‘1’ or ‘4’ or ‘52’) to the unrelativized question *How many are there?* Unique numerical answers are legitimately given to questions that include a legitimate sortal (*How many cards are there?*). Relative counting is useful, but may be “insufficiently general” because consideration must be given to other paradoxical cases as well. Bohn explains:

It makes little sense to say that forming a set is a relation that only holds of concepts. In the case of impure sets, it is usually the things that fall under a concept that are members of and form a set, not the concept. So, it is better to say that in all “problematic” cases of the same kind as the three above, i.e. in all cases of predication whose truth depends on a unique kind of “division” or “decomposition” of the value of the subject term, the properties and relations hold relative to concepts, not of concepts. This way the road to the above paradoxes is immediately blocked: having a property F, or standing in a relation R, relative to C1, but not having it or standing in it relative to C2 is no paradox. A formula of the form $F(x_1, \dots, x_n, c_1) \& \sim F(x_1, \dots, x_n, c_2)$ is no contradiction... Does invoking concepts as relational units entail some form of mind-dependence or lack of objectivity with respect to the relational properties? Only to the extent concepts are mind-dependent or lack objectivity, which I take it, in good Fregean spirit, they aren't and don't.⁴⁴

⁴³ Frege 1884 (§22).

⁴⁴ Bohn, 222.

Arguments of the NUMBER sort equivocate when charging differing cardinality to parts and wholes by not accounting for the different modes of presentation/conceptualization and are thus invalid.

Next consider TEMPORAL: If CAI is true, then the Lego bricks are (strictly) identical to the Lego wall. But if this is so, then by LLII, any property the Lego bricks have the Lego wall must have as well. But the Lego bricks existed at time t_1 , while the Lego wall did not. So, the Lego bricks are not identical to the Lego wall. So, CAI is false.

One way to mitigate this argument is to claim that ordinary objects are composed of more than merely spatial parts. Following Lewis (1986), Heller (1984), Sider (1997, 2001), one could claim that ordinary objects are composed of temporal parts as well as spatial parts. It may be the case that ordinary objects are four-dimensional sums of spatial and temporal parts. What grounds certain temporal facts about a person—that she used to be 3 feet tall, that she is going to change her hair color to pink, etc.—is that a temporal part of a four-dimensional sum *is* in fact 3 feet tall, *does* in fact have pink hair, etc. ‘Change’ is qualitative difference between temporal parts. The hair *changes* from blonde to pink by having a temporal part that is blonde and another temporal part that is pink. This avoids violating LLII since the temporal part that is blonde is non-identical to the temporal part that is pink. Both temporal parts, however (along with many other parts), compose the person.

Assume ordinary objects like Lego bricks and Lego walls actually are four-dimensional sums of spatial and temporal parts. This assumption allows the CAI theorist to maintain that the four-dimensional Lego-brick-sum is distinct from the four-dimensional Lego-wall-sum since the Lego wall is not composed of all and only the Lego bricks, given this assumption. The four-dimensional Lego-brick-sum includes some temporal parts that are not included in the Lego-

wall-sum and since the Lego wall does not exist until t_2 , any relevant Lego parts at t_1 compose the Lego bricks, not the Lego wall.

If only spatial parts are under consideration, then the Lego bricks are (collectively) identical to the Lego wall according to CAI. Once temporal facts are introduced, however, the CAI theorist can legitimately assume that it is no longer merely spatial parts under consideration and can then reevaluate the identity claim. If a four-dimensional object such as a Lego-brick-sum that has *all* of its spatial and temporal parts in common with a Lego-wall-sum, as some interpretations of four-dimensionalism contend,⁴⁵ *then* the CAI theorist will accept the identity claim that the Lego bricks are (collectively) identical with the Lego wall. But this would remove any teeth that TEMPORAL might have since there is no temporal feature that the parts (the Lego bricks) have that the whole (the Lego wall) does not, and so the appeal to LLII would be wasted.

Importantly, these potential moves are consistent with CAI, since there may be two distinct wholes (the Lego-brick-sum and the Lego-wall-sum) each of which is identical to its parts, or there may be one whole (the collection of Legos variously construed as a pile, as a wall, etc.) which is identical to its parts (the Lego bricks).

Finally, consider MODAL: If CAI is true, then the Lego bricks are (strictly) identical to the Lego wall. But if this is so, then by LLII, any property the Lego bricks have the Lego wall must have as well. But the Lego bricks could have survived being scattered, while the Lego wall could not. So, the Lego bricks are not identical to the Lego wall. So, CAI is false.

Arguments of this sort contend that even if four-dimensionalism is granted, it is still the case that there is a property of the Lego bricks that is not a property of the Lego wall, namely

⁴⁵ Such interpretations take the collection of Legos over all its tensed ($t_1, t_2, t_3, \dots, t_n$) features to be the *same* collection (such as t_1 =scattered over the floor, t_2 =piled, t_3 =made into a wall, etc.), just as a person is blonde at t_n and pink-haired at t_{n+1} .

that Lego bricks could survive being scattered, but the Lego wall could not. The Lego wall never needs to actually be scattered for these properties to hold, just the possibility of scattering is enough to make the properties hold.

A response to this argument could contend that when it comes to *de re* modal predication, such predication is flexible and dependent on a certain way of conceptualizing the object in question. So, it may be true that the Lego wall is identical to Lego bricks, but to say that the Lego wall could not survive being scattered is just to say that the Lego wall has *Lego wall* counterparts that do not survive being scattered, which is also consistent with the Lego wall having *Lego bricks* counterparts that do survive being scattered. And all of this is consistent with the fact that the Lego wall is identical to Lego bricks.

Wallace contends that if the CAI theorist accepts flexible *de re* predication, then she can explain how it is that modal properties that seemingly distinguish parts from wholes are really just two different ways of conceptualizing what is in fact identical. The only difference is that instead of the identity claim in question being a one-one relation it is many-one (Lego bricks [collectively] = Lego wall). The CAI theorist can block MODAL by denying that modal predicates such as *could have survived being scattered* apply to the Lego bricks but do not apply to the Lego wall based on counterpart theory and a different manner of conceptualizing the same portion of reality.

So it seems that all the challenges presented against CAI can be met. CAI makes important use of numerically hybrid identity statements, which *are* grammatical in colloquial English, Norwegian, Hungarian, and in formal logical languages. CAI can provide coherent truth-conditions for numerically hybrid identity statements, namely when the value, v , of xx is identical with the value of y —‘ $xx=y$ ’ is satisfied iff $v(xx)$ is identical with $v(y)$. CAI says that

the truth-condition for 'xxCy' is satisfied iff $v(xx)$ is identical with $v(y)$. CAI can also stand against charges alleging inconsistency with Leibniz's Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals, since the arguments making such allegations are either invalid based on equivocation or they contain a false premise based on a misunderstanding of conceptualization.

Section III—Composition as Identity—a Philosophical Move Implemented Demonstrating the Coherence of ONE and THREE

Can CAI really help the address the logical challenges raised against the Trinity? It certainly seems so. The main logical objections raised against the doctrine pit the following creedal summary statements against each other.

ONE: There is one God.

THREE: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

On a simple CAI reading, there is no paradox here at all. The one God *is* the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) *are* the one God. The one God is composed of the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) compose the one God. The three persons are distinct divine persons, but it is not the case that each person individually/distributively is identical with God. Yet proponents of logical critiques of the Trinity regularly try to elicit contradiction by charging that the doctrine claims that the Father individually is identical to God, that the Son individually is identical to God, and that the Holy Spirit individually is identical to God. If it is the case that the doctrine states that the persons (distributively) are each identical to God, then there must be three⁴⁶ Gods, contradicting ONE.

Shieva Kleinschmidt alleges that the doctrine of the Trinity makes just this critical error.

⁴⁶ Or four, depending on how one posits 'count nouns' and sortals. More on this to come.

The doctrine of the Trinity is, put simply, a conjunction of these three claims: (i) There are three distinct Divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, (ii) each Divine Person is God, and (iii) there is exactly one God. However, if there are three distinct Persons that are each God, we should get the result there are three Gods. It seems Trinitarian Christians are having trouble counting: they need 3 to equal 1.⁴⁷

The trinitarian may be quite capable of counting if there is an errant claim in Kleinschmidt's summary. The errant claim rests in (ii). Kleinschmidt interprets the creeds to say that each divine person individually, or distributively, is identical with God. She therefore writes (ii) as a statement of numerical identity. But nothing in the statements summarizing creedal orthodoxy requires that the persons distributively are each identical to God. In fact, the creeds seem to explicitly reject this faulty notion. Claiming that the creeds do, in fact, declare that the persons distributively are each identical to God is an unfortunate misunderstanding of the creeds. Consider the following Athanasian Creedal affirmations:⁴⁸

- (a) The Father is uncreated; the Son is uncreated; and the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
And yet there are not three uncreated, but one uncreated.
- (b) The Father is unlimited; the Son is unlimited; and the Holy Spirit is unlimited.
And yet there are not three infinites, but one infinite.
- (c) The Father is eternal; the Son is eternal; and the Holy Spirit is eternal.
And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.
- (d) Father is Almighty; the Son is Almighty; and the Holy Spirit is Almighty.
And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.
- (e) The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.
And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
- (f) So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; and the Holy Spirit is Lord.
And yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.
- (g) We acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
We are forbidden to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.

(a)-(g) all follow the same pattern: The Father is X, the Son is X, the Holy Spirit is X, and yet there are not three Xs, but one X. The only way to make sense of this pattern which ascribes

⁴⁷ Kleinschmidt, 84.

⁴⁸ This list does not exhaust the creed, but only highlights those affirmations pertinent to the Kleinschmidt's understanding of (ii).

X to each of the persons, but does not yield three Xs is to read the statements *not* as employing the “is of identity,” but as utilizing the “is of predication” when ascribing X to the persons and then to read the creedal statements as using the (collective) “is/are of identity” when denying that there are three Xs.⁴⁹ The denial that there are three Xs seems to be based on a collective understanding of the divine persons who together compose the one God. The creedal affirmations seem to make use of distinct understandings of ‘is/are.’⁵⁰ A non-creedal example may help see the distinction played out.

Suppose a wall is composed of only three bricks. Under CAI, the bricks (collectively) compose the wall (xxCy, where xx=the bricks and y=the wall). Since there is a numerically hybrid identity statement which understands the bricks (collectively) to compose the wall, following the form xx=y, the wall is identical to the bricks collectively, not individually. Now ascribe a property to each of the bricks, say redness. So it is the case that b₁ is red, b₂ is red, and b₃ is red. How many red things are there? It seems like ‘three’ could be the answer as there are

⁴⁹ The ‘is’ of identity, among other features, is symmetrical; whereas predication is not. ‘Eternal’ is predicable of the Father, but the Father is not predicable of ‘eternal.’).

⁵⁰ In addition to making use of the “is of identity” and the “is of ascription,” philosophy also makes use of the “is of composition.” The “is of composition” is employed when a group collectively composes a whole. It is the claim of this project that the three divine persons (the Trinity) compose God. The “is of composition” does not have to make an identity claim. Saying that Socrates’ body is (composed of) skin and bone is not to say that Socrates’ body is identical to skin and bone. After all, there is skin and bone that do not compose Socrates. The “is of composition” serves as a subcategory of the “is of ascription.” Saying that Socrates’ body is (composed of) skin and bone is to say that Socrates’ body fits into the category *skin and bone*. That is, Socrates’ body predicatively has the property “is composed of skin and bone,” ascribed to it. Other bodies might also be so composed. The “is of composition,” as subcategory of the “is of ascription” is only employed when the linguistic context demands it. Linguistically, the “is of composition” serves as a subcategory of the “is of ascription,” noting that some whole is fully inside of a given linguistic category, not that the whole in question fully exhausts that linguistic category. Mereologically, the composition relation *is* the identity relation. It seems that the creeds simply use “is/are” and the interpreter must decide if the use of “is/are” intends an identity, an ascription, or a composition reading. Context will help determine which use is meant.

three red bricks. But if the three bricks collectively compose the wall, it seems like ‘one’ could be the answer as there is only the one red wall.⁵¹ ‘Four’ should not be the answer because the three bricks (collectively) *are* identical to the one wall since they compose it, so claiming ‘four’ would be an instance of double counting.

Consider the following affirmation:

(h) b_1 is red, b_2 is red, and b_3 is red.

And yet there are not three reds, but one red.

Again, how many red things are there? While it is tempting to say ‘three’ based on the first line of the affirmation, the second line explicitly states that the answer is ‘one,’ indicating that the sortal assumed in the question *How many red things are there?* is ‘walls’/wholes. Some may claim that affirmation (h) is incoherent because the first line claims that there are three reds and the second line claims that there are not three reds, which is a contradiction. Contradiction, however, only abounds under a particular reading of (h). If the first line employs the ‘is of identity,’ then, yes, contradiction emerges. But no contradiction exists if (1) the first line employs the ‘is of predication,’ (2) the second line employs the ‘is/are of identity’ when denying that there are three reds, and (3) the second line assumes CAI when referring to the numerically singular whole.

It may seem as though this is an unnecessarily complex understanding of (h), but it is also a necessary understanding of (h) if one is to avoid contradiction. Imagine not being asked to interpret (h) as reader, but to write an affirmation of the following: *there are three bricks; each brick is numerically distinct; each brick has the property of redness; the bricks collectively compose a single wall; the wall has the property of redness; the bricks never fail to compose the*

⁵¹ A whole can have a property in virtue of the parts having them and parts can have properties predicated of them in virtue of the whole having them. In this case, the former obtains.

wall; CAI is true; and to write it in such a way that does not make mention of one's philosophical and logical assumptions, but that instead maintains poetic brevity and rhetorical cadence. One could do worse than to whip up (h). If that content served as the basis of what one wanted to affirm, and under the stricture of maintaining poetic brevity and rhetorical cadence, it may be possible to present a more precise and equally brief and poetic rendering of that content, but (h) is certainly an acceptable affirmation of that content under such stricture.

Might it be the case that the ancient Creeds of Christendom were devised in a philosophically rich milieu but under the compulsion to compact the logically coherent beliefs of the Christian faith into a brief, poetically robust set of affirmations which would be easy to memorize and recite aloud? This seems, in fact, to be exactly what the creeds are and how they function.

Consider (a)-(d). How many uncreated, infinites, eternal, and Almighty are there? Consider (a)-(d)'s first lines in isolation from the other lines of the creed. In each case, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each have a property ascribed to them. Under an 'is of identity' reading of the affirmations' first lines, each person is identical to the property listed. Under such a reading, the answer to the question *How many uncreated, infinites, eternal, and Almighty are there?* is clearly 'three.' Then using basic logical laws of identity, each person must be identical to the others, but this violates the creed's forbidding the 'confounding' of the persons.

Under an 'is of predication' reading of the affirmations' first lines, each person has the same properties predicated of them, but the persons are not identical to those properties. This means that while fully uncreated, unlimited, eternal, and Almighty, none of the persons exhaust those categories, since the other persons also completely fit into those property categories. Under such a reading, the answer to the question *How many uncreated, infinites, eternal, and*

Almighties are there? is undetermined without knowing (1) the creedal literary context of these lines, and/or (2) the philosophical/logical commitments of the creed's authors. Fortunately, the literary context of the creed is clear, and the authors of the creed were not haphazard logicians.⁵²

According to the first lines, each person has a given property predicatively. Since the nature of the second lines of (a)-(d) explicitly denies the answer 'three,' shouldn't the 'is of identity' reading of the first lines be rejected on pain of contradiction? Why should the 'is of identity' reading be endorsed given the literary context of the creed and the author's commitment to logic and reasoning?⁵³

Consider (a)-(d)'s second line. In each case, it is affirmed that the answer to the question *How many uncreated, infinities, eternals, and Almighties are there?* is not three, but 'one.' These second lines have two components: a denial of distributive independent predications made of the persons and an affirmation of the predication of the collectively unified persons—i.e. the 'Trinity in Unity.' The initial component seems to employ the 'is/are of identity' for the explicit purpose of denying that there are three uncreated, infinities, eternals, and Almighties. The explicit emphasis is clear: there is no distributive identity obtaining. It is simply not the case that there are three independent eternals because, unlike bricks that could still exist as red and not be a part of the wall, the three eternal persons necessarily coexist as parts of the one being that is God.⁵⁴

The latter component seems to assume a CAI understanding. The reason that there is only 'one'

⁵² See Kelly, JND. *Early Christian Creeds*. Routledge, 1962.

⁵³ It seems that contradiction is what the opponents of the Trinity want and that a merely *prima facie* understanding of the doctrine that ignores the literary context of the creeds or an *ad hoc* reading of particular lines of the creeds which formulate the orthodox understanding of the doctrine helps to generate a contradiction.

⁵⁴ A full treatment of FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY, the creedal summary statements that support this claim, will come in the trinitarian models section.

uncreated, infinite, eternal, and Almighty is that the three persons (Trinity) compose the one God (Unity).

Now consider (e)-(g).

- (e) The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.
And yet they are not three Gods; but one God.
- (f) So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; and the Holy Spirit is Lord.
And yet they are not three Lords; but one Lord.
- (g) We acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
We are forbidden to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.

Consider (e) The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.
And yet they are not three Gods; but one God.

Even though (e) and (f) follow the exact pattern of predicating properties to the persons and then denying distributive identity before affirming collective identity, just as above in (a)-(d), Kleinschmidt insists that the Athanasian Creed in (e) affirms that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distributively each God and claims that utilizing a CAI approach “just looks like the denial of the original claim in the Athanasian creed; to interpret the original statement in a way that makes it compatible with what appears to be its denial seems problematic.”⁵⁵

The reason that Kleinschmidt contends that the pattern breaks with (e) is most likely the use of the term ‘God.’ ‘God’ often functions like a proper name for the one God, but must it always so function? Certainly not. There is a predicative property usage of the term as well.⁵⁶ It is not always immediately clear which usage is intended when the term is employed. Consider the following uses:

- (h) Jesus is God.
- (i) The Trinity is God.
- (j) And yet they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are not three Gods; but one God.

⁵⁵ Kleinschmidt, 14.

⁵⁶ Much more on the function of the term ‘God’ will follow in the final part of this dissertation.

Proper names are linked to identity,⁵⁷ but none of these examples require the term ‘God’ to function as a proper name. The key to determining the usage of the term ‘God’ does not lie in its deployment, but with the verb of the sentence in which it is deployed. Each of (h)-(j) include either an ‘is’ or an ‘are’ (the same verb but conjugated for singular and for plural subjects).

Consider (h): Jesus is God.

Jesus (the Son) is a divine person according to the Christian faith and as laid out in the creeds. ‘Jesus’ is the subject and ‘God’ is the object and ‘is’ is the verb. How does the verb function? As noted above, ‘is’ can be read in an identity way or in a predicative way. Under the ‘is of identity’ reading, Jesus is identical to God. Every property that Jesus has God has and every property that God has Jesus has. If Jesus or God has a property that the other does not have, then Jesus is not identical to God. Assuming trinitarianism and CAI, Jesus has (among others) the properties of being a part of the Trinity and not being the whole Trinity, but God has the properties of being the whole Trinity and not being a part of the Trinity. Given trinitarianism and CAI, then, Jesus is not identical to God. So what is to be made of (h)? Is it a false statement or is there another possible reading of it?

‘Is’ does more work than merely indicate identity. Under an ‘is of predication’ reading of (h), Jesus is not identical with God since he is not everything that God is (Jesus is not the Trinity), but Jesus is located fully within the category ‘God,’ yet Jesus does not exhaust the category. It is not a contradiction to say that someone else is also under the same category. This is, in fact, exactly what the Athanasian Creed affirms. It is like saying ‘Kamie is beautiful.’ Kamie is not identical to beauty since she is not everything that beauty is, but Kamie is located

⁵⁷ See Kiripke (*Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.) and Lewis (“Index, Context and Content,” in *Papers in Philosophical Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21–44. 1998.).

fully within the category ‘beautiful,’ yet Kamie does not exhaust the category. ‘Kamie is beautiful’ is not inconsistent with ‘Kim is beautiful’ and ‘Kamie is not Kim.’ The reason those three statements are consistent is that the ‘is’ does not denote identity in the first two statements, but ascribes a property to both Kamie and to Kim. The final statement’s use of ‘is’ does denote identity, explicitly denying that Kamie and Kim are identical.

The property that (h) ascribes to Jesus is something like *is a divine person*, which is exactly what the creed affirms. Since the creed explicitly denies the logical outcome of having three Gods, the ‘is’ in (e), as it is in (h), must be serving as the ‘is of predication.’ The only difficulty that remains is that (e) does not say ‘Jesus (the Son) is a divine person,’ it says *Jesus (the Son) is God*. But since ‘is a divine person’ is a legitimate reading of ‘is God,’ under predicative property assignment, the fact that ‘God’ often plays the part of a proper name, should not drive one’s interpretation to the ‘is of identity.’

Consider (i): The Trinity is God.

Here the ‘is’ must indicate identity. Even under trinitarian theories that do not make use of CAI, God is identical to the Trinity. No ‘is of predication’ reading makes sense for (i) since ‘The Trinity’ functions as a proper name functions, not as a property predicated of something. The property predicated of something indicating that it is the Trinity is *triune*. The term ‘God’ can serve as a predication, but since the Trinity is everything that God is, given trinitarianism, and since the Trinity fully exhausts the category ‘God,’ an ‘is of predication’ reading collapses into an employment of the ‘is of identity.’

Consider (j): And yet they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are not three Gods; but one God.

Here the ‘to be’ verb is conjugated for a plural subject—they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit collectively). Importantly (j) is an example of a negation of the verb followed by an

assumed usage of the verb. The only legitimate reading of the *are not* verb in (j) is an ‘are of identity’ reading because the object (three Gods) cannot function as a predicative category since the category would be repeated in triplicate if the verb were not negated. Categories have no need of reduplication because things that are not identical to each other can coexist in a given category so long as none (distributively) exhaust that category. If something fully exhausts a given category, than anything in that category is identical to that something. Since (j) specifically notes that *they are not three Gods, but one God*, this is not a case of three non-identical things coexisting within the category ‘God.’ All this prevents an ‘are of predication’ reading. This is a case of ‘they’ collectively being one thing, and since the one thing they are fully exhausts the category (according to the creed), even if the authors had ‘God’ in mind as a property category able to be predicated of something, that category understanding becomes an identity relationship in virtue of the complete conceptual overlap of ‘they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit)’ and ‘God.’

Consider (f): So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; and the Holy Spirit is Lord.
And yet they are not three Lords; but one Lord.

The same problem presents itself as in (e). Instead of ‘God,’ the term in play is ‘Lord.’ The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all said to be Lord, but (f) insists that they are not three Lords, but one Lord. An ‘is/are of predication’ is the preferable reading for the first line if one is to allow the creed to prohibit a modalistic confounding of the persons. The second line, as in (e), cannot be read as the ‘are of predication,’ however, because of the issue of total conceptual overlap and must therefore be read as an ‘are of identity.’ If the second line did not employ a negative formulation of the ‘are of predication,’ there would be not three, but only one predication of the category ‘Lord,’ but since the three are non-identical to each other they could all coexist in the same category and be lordly. This total conceptual overlap means that the one

predication of the category ‘Lord’ becomes an identity relationship: the one Lord is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit collectively. The best way to make sense of this is Composition as Identity.

Consider lastly: (g) We acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
We are forbidden to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.

At first glance, (g) seems to present a logical problem. If each person by himself is God and Lord, then how can it be forbidden to say there are three Gods or three Lords? Again, everything turns on the proper reading of ‘is.’ If one is to be charitable at all to the authors of the creeds, then one should look for a way to preserve the coherence of what they affirm. To do otherwise is to beg the question against the logic of credal affirmations. If the first line of (g), which assumes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be the persons under consideration, employs the ‘*to be* of identity’ for each person distributively/individually, then it would be undeniable that there are three Gods and three Lords. Reading the verb ‘to be’ as a statement of identity is not the only acceptable reading, however. The first line of (g) can be read to say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each by himself falls under the categories ‘God’ and ‘Lord.’ If a person fully falls under a given category, then the property content understanding of that category is predicated upon that person, such that the Father is divine (what it means to be fully inside the category ‘God’) and is lordly—fully possessed of all the rights and privileges of being Lord (what it means to be fully inside the category ‘Lord’). Likewise for the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are fully inside the categories ‘God’ and ‘Lord.’ Such a ‘*to be* of predication’ reading absolves the first line of (g) from contradicting second line of (g).

The context of (g) (the Athanasian Creed) also says “the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one.” Given this context, it seems that the use of the verb *to be* invokes the ‘is of predication’ in the first line, but then shifts to the ‘is/are of identity’ in the

second line. The property *all one* belongs to the Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit collectively. It is together that the persons form the Godhead which is ‘one.’ The reason we are forbidden to say there are three Gods or three Lords is that while each divine person falls within the categories ‘God’ and ‘Lord,’ only together do the persons fully exhaust those categories and fully exhausting a category (complete conceptual overlap) is another way of describing the identity relation. If each fully exhausted the categories, then each would be identical to each other, but if each does not fully exhaust the category, then all three can coexist within those categories, and there would be three Gods and three Lords, insofar as three persons are each predicated the property ‘God’ and ‘Lord.’ Since we are forbidden to say (presumably because it is false to say) that there are three Gods and three Lords, it must be the case that the second line of (g) is making an identity claim and what is forbidden is saying that there are three persons who are each distributively identical to God or Lord. The second line of (g) must be an instance of the ‘is/are of identity’ since the ‘one’ which referred to the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit earlier in the creed, is used again here. The one God and Lord is numerically identical to the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (the Trinity).

Drawing distinctions in the employment of the verb ‘to be’ (and its various conjugations: is, are, to be) is an acceptable reading of the particular syntax involved in creedal affirmations. Composition as Identity seems to be an essential element in deriving this coherent understanding of the creeds. When referring to the persons (distributively), the creeds affirm that each person predicatively falls under particular property categories. When referring to persons (collectively—the Trinity in Unity), the creeds affirm important identity statements. In this way

CAI proves of great use to the Trinitarian, opposing Kleinschmidt's assertion that CAI "is not useful in helping reconcile the claims in the Doctrine of the Trinity."⁵⁸

Kleinschmidt has the same logic in mind when she makes her claim, preventing her dissent from being a case of meaning something by CAI other than what is discussed here, but takes a starting point that "...each Divine Person is a God," and continues in a footnote:

The language of the Athanasian Creed can be read in various ways. In this paper, I will take 'God' to be a name, and 'god' to be a count noun. When I talk of there being "one God" I mean "for any x_1, \dots, x_n , and $y_1 \dots y_n$, if x_1 stands in the identity relation to God, and $y_1 \dots y_n$, stands in the identity relation to God, the $x_1 \dots x_n$ stands in the identity relation to y_1, \dots, y_n . (Where a plurality's standing in the identity relation to an entity does not entail that every member of the plurality stands in the identity relation to that entity. And of course, there might be only one member of x_1, \dots, x_n and y_1, \dots, y_n .)"⁵⁹

Given her commitment to each divine person (distributively) being a God, Kleinschmidt asks of the doctrine, "But do we really want to claim that the Persons compose God? This will require that each of the Persons is a part of God."⁶⁰ The divine persons being parts of God is unseemly to Kleinschmidt since this tends to promote Social Trinitarian views, of which she disapproves:

Suppose we claim that the Persons stand in a many-one composition relation to God; that is, they are each a proper part of God, and together compose Him. Now it seems we are simply left with a form of Social Trinitarianism...Using parthood, the Social Trinitarian will claim there is one god, God, who is a composite being whose parts are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is exactly what we have when we require that composition is many-one in our application of [CAI]. So taking the many-one option requires that the [CAI] theorist endorse a response to the puzzle of the Trinity which can stand on its own.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Kleinschmidt, 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 9.

⁶¹ Ibid, 11.

Why must CAI promote a trinitarianism that can stand independent of Social Trinitarianism (ST) or Latin Trinitarianism (LT)? It seems a peculiar requirement of a mereological notion that it explain a theological doctrine on its own, outside the theological and philosophical milieu in which the doctrine is often described. Of course, CAI makes no commitment to ST inherently. CAI is a mereological notion that seeks to make sense of the identity relation in a particular version of Christian Theism.

Understanding God to be identical to the divine persons (collectively) is itself not a ST move as it does not start with the persons and then seek to explain the Unity. Nor is such an understanding an LT move as it does not start with the Unity and then seek to explain the persons. Rather, such an understanding claims that cardinality is not an inherent property of anything until relativized to some category of understanding the thing in question. God is Unity when counting ‘gods.’ God is Trinity when counting ‘persons.’ CAI helps to solidify an understanding that God just is the Trinity. It is, in fact, quite the upshot of CAI as a logical/philosophical starting point for trinitarian theorizing that neither ST nor LT is privileged prior to assessing potential models of trinitarian explication. CAI seems to be useful tool to the trinitarian seeking to demonstrate the logical coherence of the doctrine against the puzzles presented.

Still, Kleinschmidt posits all CAI theorists as Social Trinitarians and declares:

Social Trinitarians say that there is only one thing that is identical to God, namely the community or fusion (or something relevantly similar) of the Persons. But we still want to preserve as much as possible the claim that each Person is a god. Monotheists cannot endorse both claims without appealing to one of the other responses to the problem of the Trinity (like relative identity, Modalism, etc.). The only way in which the monotheist Social Trinitarian can claim the Persons are gods is via appeal to something like derivative Divinity. However, if we cared enough about the godhood of the Persons, we would combine our [ST] with polytheism. We would still have only one God in the sense of having a single community of Divine Persons, but there would also be a god for each of the

Persons to be identical to (so: there would be a total of four gods, one of whom is identical to God). Of course, Social Trinitarians needn't be polytheistic.⁶²

Kleinschmidt continues directly in a footnote, "For instance, one could deny the claim that the Persons *are* God in any sense stronger than being *proper parts of* or *members of* God. My claim that applying [CAI] to the Trinity produces a form of [ST], however, still stands."⁶³

The insistence that "we still want to preserve as much as possible the claim that each Person is a god" is a relic of the '*is*' *is always the 'is of identity'* interpretation of the creeds, disputed above. It is not a creedal commitment that each person be a god, where 'god' serves as a count noun. The creedal commitment to each person being God can be understood in terms of property category predication. It is a creedal commitment, however, that "there are not three Gods, but one God" where 'God' serves as a count noun (just like 'god'). The move Kleinschmidt suggests from ST to polytheism is haphazard. There need not be a count noun 'god' for each person to be identical to if each person has the property 'God' predicated of him.

Even with polytheism out of the picture, Kleinschmidt contends that creeds demand that each person be identical to a 'god' count noun. The results of such a demand would be problematic for the trinitarian. According to Kleinschmidt, trinitarians employing CAI want to avoid double-counting when considering the whole after already considering the parts that compose it:

Fregean counting won't actually help us avoid double-counting in cases where the composite falls under the same relevant sortal as the parts. So it will not help us avoid double-counting with respect to gods, since each Person is a god, while the plurality is also identical to a god. To see why, imagine taking a bunch of dog statues, and making larger dog statue out of them. When we want to know how many statues are there, we must count the composite statue, and each of the statues that make it up. We seem to count the same portion of reality twice, in spite of sortal-relativization, and so end up with a number that's higher than it

⁶² Ibid, 11-12.

⁶³ Ibid, Footnote, P 12.

should be. One might claim that the dog statue case is not analogous to the case of the Trinity—after all, we have different sortals with the Trinity, which I’ve used throughout this paper: Gods and Persons. However, if we take the Trinitarian to be asserting that each Person is a god, and we claim that God is a god composed of the Persons, we have the result that a god is composed of gods. So when counting by gods, we must count the one god that Trinitarians posit, and the three gods that the fusion has as its parts. (After all, all of the gods I’ve mentioned are numerically distinct; while the fusion may be identical to the plurality of gods, it is not identical with each god).⁶⁴

This unwanted logical outcome dissolves under the interpretation that each divine person is not a ‘god’ count noun, but has the property ‘God,’ predicated of them, meaning that each person falls under the category ‘God’ and is thus divine, but also that no person individually exhausts that category. Kleinschmidt’s contention that double-counting is inevitable does not hold in the case of the Trinity owing to a different interpretation of the creeds. Neither does it hold in common examples. Consider a much more plausible example than dog statues. The Protestant Bible is a book composed of 66 books. The question *How many books are there?* when referring to the Protestant Bible is either ‘66,’ if one assumes a theological flavor to the question or ‘1’ if the question is assumed to have a books-on-the-desk flavor. The answer given, even though the Protestant Bible (a book) is made up of 66 books will not be ‘67’ since it seems that people innately understand that double-counting is wrong, even if they cannot philosophically articulate why it is wrong. Even when a composite falls under the same relevant sortal as the parts, double-counting is not a major worry if the composition relation is so tightly bound to the identity relation, as in the case of the Protestant Bible, to imply a distinction in the question. The best answer to the question *How many books are there?* when referring to the Protestant Bible is something like this: *There are 66 books that compose the Protestant Bible. Yes, the Protestant Bible is a single book and yes there are 66 books that compose it, but the one*

⁶⁴ Ibid 12-13.

book (the Bible) just is the 66 books and the 66 books just are one Bible. This is an answer that makes sense and that refuses to present cardinality independent of implied sortal relativization. The sortal ‘book’ applies to both the composite and the parts, but an implied sortal distinction exists between ‘book as physical object with cover’ and ‘book of the Bible.’ Anyone who dissented from the answer given claiming that the best answer is something like: *No, that’s not it. The answer is 67 on account of the composite and the parts sharing a sortal,* would be seen as someone trying to promote mereological fisticuffs.

CAI is a tool available to the trinitarian theorist that helps provide conceptual clarity, helps to answer paradoxes of cardinality generally, and helps to answer the paradox of the Trinity being one and three. CAI can be defended and endorsed despite not garnering widespread acceptance among the philosophical community. While CAI helps to demonstrate how the creedal affirmations ONE and THREE are coherent, it does not aid in demonstrating the logical coherence of the creedal affirmations FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY. The discussion surrounding the latter two affirmations falls outside the purview of Composition as Identity.⁶⁵

Section IV—Demonstrating the Coherence of FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY

The logical problem of the Trinity is to explain how the creedal summary statements are logically consistent. The most often alleged cases of logical inconsistency within the Trinity involve creedal summary statements ONE and THREE. Having addressed the consistency of ONE and THREE above, the challenge of assessing the logical consistency of FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY must be met.

(FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps

⁶⁵ CAI will play an important role in the discussion of the models of trinitarian theorizing to come.

with the Son, perhaps not).

(EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

How can the three persons of the Trinity be ontologically equal if it is the case that the Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit? The very nature of the Father being the source of the Son and Holy Spirit seems to imply the superiority of the Father. To address this concern, the nature of both the Father somehow being the source of the other persons, and the nature of ontological equality must be explored.

Consider FATHERSOURCE. The Nicene Creed provides creedal orthodoxy concerning this issue by affirming (among other things) the following about the Son and the Holy Spirit:

(a) The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

The creed provides the following affirmations by way of explication of (a). The Son is:

(a.i) God from God

(a.ii) Light from Light

(a.iii) True God from True God

(a.iv) Begotten, not made

(a.v) One in being with the Father

(b) The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father [and the Son].

The Athanasian Creed affirms:

(c) The Father is neither made, nor created, nor begotten.

(d) The Son is neither made, nor created; but begotten of the Father alone.

(e) The Holy Spirit is neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeds from the Father [and the Son].

How is the Father the source of the Son? The Father begets the Son (a), (d). The Son is begotten of the Father alone (d) and is begotten eternally (a). Being begotten is not the same as being made (a.iv), (d), and it is not the same thing as being created (d), and it is not the same thing and proceeding (e). Whatever begetting is, the creeds explicitly state what it is not. What is begetting in this creedal context, then? C.S. Lewis explains:

We don't use the words begetting or begotten much in modern English, but everyone still knows what they mean. To beget is to become the father of: to

create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set—or he may make something more like himself than a wireless set: say, a statue. If he is a clever enough carver he may make a statue which is very like a man indeed. But, of course, it is not a real man; it only looks like one. It cannot breathe or think. It is not alive.

Now that is the first thing to get clear. What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God.⁶⁶

The Father eternally begets the Son and thus the Son is eternally of the same kind as the Father, or one in being with the Father (a.v). One in being means that there is no “dividing the Essence,” (a stricture of the Athanasian Creed). But does begetting indicate that the Son once was not existent or existed in a state unlike the Father’s? No. Since the begetting is eternal, there was never a time the Son was not and as eternally begotten, the Son is eternally of the same kind as the Father.

A great deal of mystery abounds, but this is somewhat expected. There is no analogue to eternal divine begetting. According to Origen, the Father eternally begetting the Son is an “exceptional process, worthy of God.”⁶⁷ He continues:

We can find no comparison whatever, not merely in things, but even in thought and imagination, such that by its aid human thought could apprehend how the unbegotten God becomes Father of the only-begotten Son. It is an eternal and everlasting begetting, as brightness is begotten from light. For he does not become Son in an exceptional way through the adoption of the Spirit, but is Son by nature.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. Chapter 23.

⁶⁷ Origen, *On First Principles*. 1.2.4, trans. G.W. Butterworth, 2013.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The Son is Son by nature, not by adoption. Adoption is a choice. One's nature is not a choice. Importantly, the Father does not choose to beget the Son, but rather the Son's being begotten is independent of the Father's will. If the Father's choice and will were operative in the begetting of the Son, that would have seemed to the creedal authors tantamount to saying that Father was prior to the Son. St. Athanasius himself held that the expression "by the Father's will" was inappropriate. Since the Son was naturally the Son of the Father from all eternity, the Son's generation transcends any act of will.⁶⁹

Mystery is one thing, but is there any way to positively describe what is going on when it is affirmed that the Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit? Senor provides just that:

We can start to address the distinction question if we think of the single particular [divine] nature as being multileveled (obviously this is all metaphor). The fundamental level is the Father, the second level is the Son, and the third is the Holy Spirit; that is, the Father is the ontological ground of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. This does not imply that the Father *creates* either the Son or Holy Spirit, however, because the means by which the Son and the Holy Spirit are produced is will-independent. In any possible situation in which the Father exists, the Son and the Holy Spirit exist, and they are eternally brought about as a necessary extension of the Father's very existence. Yet there is an important asymmetry at work here: the Son and Holy Spirit are ontologically dependent on the Father, while the Father is ontologically independent of them. What does this mean? Let's say that B is ontologically dependent on A if were it not for A's productive powers, B would not exist. So even though each member of the Trinity exists necessarily and eternally, the Son and the Holy Spirit are ontologically dependent on the Father although the Father is not ontologically dependent on either of them.⁷⁰

This provides a model of the Trinity that addresses how it is that the Father can be the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (the Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit is proceeded by the Father [and the Son]) and the three persons be equal (there is no superiority since the Father's generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit is will-independent and thus all three

⁶⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 276.

⁷⁰ Senor. 343.

are coeternal and possess the same necessity, which is to say that if the Father exists, so must the Son and the Holy Spirit).

How is the Father the source of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father [and Son] (b), (e). Proceeding is not same thing as being made (e), and it is not the same thing and being created (e), and it is not the same thing as being begotten (e). Whatever proceeding is, the creeds explicitly state what it is not.

The eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father is, likewise, will-independent. In any possible situation that the Father exists, the Holy Spirit exists and is eternally brought about as a necessary extension of the Father's very existence. The Holy Spirit is like the third level of the single particular divine nature, of which the Father is the fundamental level.

Is this third level dependent upon the second level (the Son) or just on the first level (the Father)? Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father alone or from the Father and the Son? The creeds never state that the Father alone is the source of the Holy Spirit, but they explicitly state that the Father alone is the source of the Son (d). Both (b) and (e) affirm that the source of the Holy Spirit is the Father [and the Son]. The reason that the phrase *and the Son* is in brackets owes to the fact that not all Trinitarians agree that the Son is the co-source of the Holy Spirit along with the Father.

The Latin term for "and the Son" is *filioque*. The controversial nature of this phrase contributed to the split between the Eastern and Western churches in A.D. 1054. The phrase was not included in the Nicene Creed in either the first version of A.D. 325 or the second version of A.D. 381. Those versions simply said that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father." But in A.D. 589, at a regional church council in Toledo, the phrase "and the Son" was added, so that the creed then said that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son."

The Eastern, or Orthodox Church, rejected the *filioque* and maintained that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, whereas the Western, or Roman Catholic Church, continues to accept it. Most Protestant churches (which reformed out of Catholicism) also accept the *filioque*.⁷¹

Opposition to the *filioque* clause seems to exist because if the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, then the Holy Spirit would be subordinate on account of this double procession and the fact that the Holy Spirit would be the only person of the Trinity not to be the source of another. Double procession does not indicate subordination any more than single procession, however, and if only the Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit, worry about subordination would still exist if one defined subordination/lack of equality in terms of being the source of another divine person. The creeds, however, define equality in other terms.

Consider EQUALITY. The Athanasian Creed affirms:

- (f) No person of the Trinity is before or after another.
 - (f.i) The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.
 - (f.ii) And yet there are not three eternal, but one eternal.
- (g) No person of the Trinity is greater or less than another.
 - (g.i) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share equal glory.
 - (g.ii) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share equal majesty.

⁷¹ According to the New Testament, there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. John 15:26 says, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.” The Greek word for “proceeds” is ἐκπορεύομαι. It means to come out of, to proceed from, depart out of, to leave from. It is used in many places in the New Testament. No specific New Testament verse says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, but John 16:7 says “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper (Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” Philippians 1:19 says, “for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

Because of these verses, many Trinitarians have concluded that there is a procession of the Spirit from the Son because of how the Holy Spirit is said to be of the Father (Matthew 10:20), of God (Romans 8:9), of the Son (Galatians 4:6), and of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:19). So, if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and he is the Spirit of the Father (Matthew 10:20), and since the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of the Son (Philippians 1:19), it seems that it must follow that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son.

- (g.iii) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share the one divine essence.
- (h) All three persons of the Trinity are coequal.
 - (h.i) Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit.

The credal affirmation of equality amongst the divine persons can be understood in two primary ways: eternity and greatness. While the Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit, none of the persons are made or created (d-e). All three are eternal (f.i). Begetting and proceeding have nothing to do with time, but are accomplished timelessly. Neither have they to do with choice. The Father's begetting the Son and proceeding the Holy Spirit is will-independent. This means that the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit necessarily and eternally generates them and such generation is not a choice the Father made. None of the persons is before or after another in terms of temporality or causality. The creed explicitly predicates the property 'uncreated' of all three divine persons. This seems to indicate that the predications 'begotten' and 'proceeds from' serve as relational distinguishers. The distinctness of the divine persons cannot be relational only, however.

While the Holy Spirit uniquely relates to the Son and Father by virtue of not being begotten of the Father, but proceeding from him (and from the Son), and the Son uniquely relates to the Father as his only begotten, and the Father uniquely relates to the Son and Spirit by virtue of being the source for both of them, something else distinguishes the divine persons as well. Each possesses a unique will. Much more on this will follow, but to qualify as a person, one must possess a unique set of mental faculties. This requirement seems necessary for the distinctness of the persons.

Distinctness of each is in terms of unique sets of mental faculties and relational generation, but the creed also affirms "one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence" (g.iii). This necessitates equality of

greatness. The Father is not greater than the Son and the Holy Spirit because he begets and proceeds them, respectively. Rather all three share in glory (g.i) and majesty (g.ii). All three are affirmed as “Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.” The greatness of the divine persons lies not in their dependence (the Son and Holy Spirit) or independence (the Father), but in their shared metaphysical and ontological necessity. Metaphysical necessity is such that if God exists, God exists in Trinity (and Trinity in Unity). The Father is the (will-independent) source of the Son and the Holy Spirit because they could not be/exist without the Father, but the Father is not the metaphysical source of the Son and Holy Spirit because in any possibility in which the Father exists, the Son and Holy Spirit must also exist. Ontological necessity is such that God must exist—there is no possibility in which God does not, could not, or might not exist,⁷² and Trinitarianism notes that God must exist in Trinity.

Equality among the divine persons is ultimately a matter of the persons jointly sharing in the one divine essence/nature. Each divine person (predicatively) is God because each is instantiated in the one, particular divine nature, but none fully exhaust that nature. Since the one essence is shared by all three persons and all three persons are distinct, not merely in terms of their relational begetting/proceeding, but also in terms of their unique set of faculties, each person is fully and equally divine.

⁷² Divine ontological necessity of God is typically described in terms of Anselmian Perfect Being Theology and makes use of various forms of the Ontological Argument for the necessary existence of God. For Anselm, God is than which none greater can be conceived. The modal versions of this argument which highlight Anselm’s use of *necessary existence* as a predicate are much stronger than the often caricatured *reductio* versions that attempt to derive God’s necessary existence making use of *existence* as predicate. The caricatured versions often mistake Anselm’s initial *reductio* as employing *existence* as a predicate as his only formulation. Anselm’s second formulation appropriately upgrades *existence* to *necessary existence* as a crucial predicate in his argument.

This explanation seems to demonstrate the coherence of FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY. Equality is grounded in the tripartite sharing of the one divine essence and the Father is the will-independent source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is nothing incoherent about affirming both of those statements simultaneously so long as they are understood in terms of the multi-leveled model described above.

Both of the most critical coherence issues—finding a way to wed ONE and THREE and to wed FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY—that apply exclusively to the orthodox delineation of the doctrine of the Trinity have been demonstrated above. While this demonstration makes use of logical distinctions and important philosophical notions, such logical and philosophical understandings are not necessary for a person to embrace the doctrine of the Trinity. Such understandings become necessary when the doctrine is challenged on grounds of incoherence as they are defeaters for such challenges. Logical challenges appeal to obvious tension that exists between ONE and THREE and between FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY. Tension is appropriate as it forces one to continually reevaluate one's notions and helps one not to favor any particular creedal statement over another. Tension does not give way to incoherence so long as one explains the creedal content in a way that is consistent with the rules of logic/identity and with a philosophically nuanced understanding of the creedal statements in their context. The above understandings attempt to do just that.

Part II—*A Priori* Trinitarianism

Section I—*A Priori* Trinitarianism Conceived

Is the motivation for Trinitarianism merely a desire to uphold traditional creedal orthodoxy and, by extension, the traditional interpretation of biblical data? While Trinitarianism

certainly emerged as a result of the early Christian community's commitment to the divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and while creedal orthodoxy stands atop biblical passages expressing the essential content of the doctrine of the Trinity, Trinitarianism is not the exclusive purview of exegetically *a posteriori* theology. There is, in fact, a strong case to be made for Trinitarianism on *a priori* grounds. Such *a priori* reasoning does not start with the creeds or with Scripture, but with the very concept of God. If one rightly conceives of God, one will come to see that God must be triune. One's reasoning might not begin with the creeds or with Scripture, but one's reasoning must be consistent with them in order to stand within traditional Christian Theism which endorses creedal orthodoxy as the essential explication of the content of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Is it even possible to arrive at an accurate concept of God without being informed by the creeds and by Scripture? Scripture itself indicates that the answer is *Yes*. Psalm 14:1 reads, "The fool says in heart, *There is no God.*" St. Anselm famously understands this Scripture to be the starting point for his offering of praise to God in which is found his Ontological Argument. Anselm contends that even an atheist with no knowledge of creeds or of Scripture can arrive at the same conception of God as the believer. The fool's use of the term 'God' is certainly meant to contain the same content as the theist's use of the term, or else the fool could not be so labeled as he would only be guilty of denying *something-other-than-what-is-rightly-intended-by-the-term- 'God,'* and it is no deficiency to deny that.

This led Anselm to profess that God is the being "than which no greater can be conceived."⁷³ An entire field of theology known as Perfect Being Theology has emerged from Anselm's enigmatic phrase and attendant arguments. According to Perfect Being Theology, God

⁷³ Anselm, *Proslogian*. Chapters 1 and 2.

is, by definition, the Greatest Conceivable Being (GCB). God's nature is constituted by a combination of great-making properties. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical and creedal data, and since what constitutes a 'great-making' property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within and assessing the Christian worldview enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God. Indeed, the aim of this project is to demonstrate that *being triune* is itself a great-making property and a property which is necessary for any conception of a *greatest* conceivable being.

Perfect Being Theology is not without its critics.⁷⁴ One common objection raised against Perfect Being theology is that it is inherently subjective since what is a great-making property to one person might not be considered great to another person. This objection seems to confuse *God's being* the greatest conceivable being with *consensus concerning* what properties the greatest conceivable being must possess. Whatever those properties may be, God must possess them to count as the GCB. There are some straightforward properties that obviously must belong to the GCB, but there are also less obvious properties to consider.

It is difficult to know in some cases which property is great-making. For example, is it greater to be timeless or omnitemporal? The answer is not immediately clear. But uncertainty as to what properties the greatest conceivable being must have does nothing to invalidate the definition of God as *the greatest conceivable being*. There cannot, by definition, be anything greater than God/GCB. A good way to develop one's conception of the GCB is to ponder certain properties and determine if those properties enhance a being who might have them or diminish such a being.

⁷⁴ Dale Tuggy, for instance, opposes such an *a priori* approach to understanding God, preferring instead *a posteriori* exegetical analysis. Tuggy will feature prominently in sections to come.

Begin this simple binary thought experiment with some of the obvious great-making properties. Consider power (construed as the disposition and ability to act in certain ways). Is a being greater for having more power than another being identical in all ways except for power? Certainly. Since power, then, is a great-making property, the GCB must possess power to a maximal degree, for otherwise one could conceive of a being with more power than the being under consideration. Since no being can be more powerful than all-powerful, the GCB must, by definition, be all-powerful/omnipotent. Of course, the very notion of power may be restrained by other aspects of God's nature. There are certain things that God cannot or will not do—for instance, God cannot torture babies for fun. One might object to an understanding of omnipotence that is in some way restrained by arguing that God cannot count as omnipotent if there is another being able to do something that the supposedly omnipotent being (God) cannot do. Beings that are nowhere close to omnipotent can still torture babies for fun, after all. This objection does not make the second being greater in power than God, but seeks to demonstrate that God is not, in fact, *all*-powerful.

Two lines of response emerge. First, the Perfect Being Theologian could respond by saying that omnipotence is not the ability (or disposition) to do anything at all, but the ability to do (or be disposed to do) anything that can be done in a broadly logical sense. It is not possible to violate one's own nature, and so if God's nature also includes moral perfection, then God cannot do certain (evil) acts. Such inability would not count against his omnipotence so defined. A second response would be to say that there is no possible combination of attributes that includes both omnipotence and necessary moral perfection. But it does not at all follow from this that God does not exist, or that God is not the greatest conceivable being, possessing the best possible combination of properties. What follows is only that the best possible combination of

great-making properties does not include both omnipotence (defined as the ability or disposition to do absolutely anything that can be done) and necessary moral perfection. This second response acquiesces on the definition of omnipotence as the ability to do anything that can be done, but holds that the GCB would not possess such a property because such a property is not great-making, all things considered. The other consideration is overall greatness. The property *able to torture babies for fun* (or perform any other morally deficient act) diminishes a conceivable being rather than enhancing such a being. So whether the Perfect Being Theologian opts for the first or the second response, she still contends that the GCB must possess the maximal degree of power possible given other great-making properties.

The same is true for the property of knowledge. A being who knows more than another being is certainly greater than that less-knowing being. No being can know more than everything that can be known, so the GCB must be all-knowing/omniscient, or else one could conceive a being who, in fact, knows more than the being under consideration, preventing that candidate from being the GCB. There is some question as to what type of knowledge is available to the GCB. Certainly, the GCB would know all propositional truth⁷⁵, but such a being would not have to know everything, but only everything that can be known according to his nature. This means that the GCB would not know what a square triangle looks like since such an object is a logically contradictory concept, nor would he know what it is like to torture babies for fun since God's moral perfection prevents him from doing such an act and thus from knowing

⁷⁵ That is, the GCB must have natural knowledge (knowledge of truth existing independent of God's choices/acts). God, it seems, would also possess free knowledge (knowledge of truth which is dependent on his choices/acts). There is considerable debate as to whether or not God possesses middle knowledge (knowledge of counterfactual choices of free creatures given certain circumstances). Open theism contends that God does not know the future choices of free creatures.

what it is like to do such an act. Of course, the GCB would know that square triangles are logically impossible, and that torturing babies for fun is wrong, and even what those who in fact do torture babies for fun experience, though the GCB does not actually experience having tortured babies for fun. So knowledge, like power, has a peak intrinsic maxima. Whatever that maxima is, the GCB possesses knowledge to that degree.

In addition to possessing power and knowledge to the maximal levels, a being is enhanced by possessing eternity, necessary existence, and moral perfection which is often equated with the notion *love*. Is a being who loves greater than a being who does not? Certainly, since love is a moral perfection. Since possessing love, then, is a great-making property, the GCB must be all-loving/omnibenevolent. This strikes theists and atheists as obvious. God, whether worshipped or thought not to exist, is considered to be good, or loving. He is praised by believers for his goodness, and he is chastised as fictional by atheists who do not see evidence of his goodness or who see evil as incompatible with his goodness. The argument for such incompatibility advanced by the atheist might look like this: *God cannot be all-loving and all-powerful simultaneously since evil exists. Either God is loving enough to stop evil but is not powerful enough to stop it, or God is powerful enough to stop evil but is not loving enough to stop it. Theists believe God is both all-loving and all-powerful. The existence of evil shows there is no all-loving and all-powerful being. There is no God.*

The literature on the problem of evil is vast, the variations of argument that flow from it are voluminous, and yet the responses to those arguments seem to adequately refute them.⁷⁶ The following set of propositions is not inconsistent:

- (a) God exists and created the world.
- (b) God is all-loving and all-powerful.

⁷⁶ See Alvin Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil* as a representative of a successful response.

(c) Evil exists.

Logical arguments from the problem of evil contend that this set is inconsistent with what is argued to be a natural implication of (a) and (b):

(d) There should be no evil.

But (d) is not inconsistent with (a)-(c). The existence of evil is consistent with the fact that there should be no evil. There may be a good reason God allows evil to exist. Even if the reason is unclear, so long as there is a possible reason, then (a)-(d) is consistent. Add to (a)-(d) the following proposition:

(e) There is good reason God allows evil.

The literature spends considerable time discussing what that reason might be, but free will seems to be the strongest candidate.⁷⁷ So the existence of evil is no bar to the GCB possessing the great-making property of love. The natural inclinations of atheists and theists alike understand that the GCB must possess love to whatever maximal degree is possible.⁷⁸

With the concept of God as GCB in mind, one can now turn toward a possible case for Trinitarianism on *a priori* grounds. Love is the great-making property most central to an *a priori* Trinitarianism.

Section II—*A Priori* Trinitarianism in Ancient and Contemporary Sources

While not the majority position within the Christian tradition, *a priori* reason concerning the Trinity has been advanced as supporting evidence for the truthfulness of the doctrine. This

⁷⁷ Plantinga forcefully makes this case. See above.

⁷⁸ Christian Scripture agrees, noting that “God is love.” 1 John 4:8,16.

section will analyze the most influential ancient source advocating an *a priori* trinitarianism and two contemporary sources that do likewise.

Richard of St. Victor

Richard of St. Victor, a prominent member of the Abbey of St. Victor in France, wrote *On the Trinity* in the third quarter of the twelfth century. His *a priori* understanding of the divine nature stands as a shining example of medieval Christian devotion and reasoning. He explains the procedure by which humans acquire knowledge of various matters:

If we desire to ascend toward the knowledge (*scientiam*) of lofty truths through insights of the mind, it is first worthwhile to know that we usually acquire knowledge (*notitiam*) of things in certain ways. Unless I am mistaken, then, we acquire knowledge of things in three ways: we demonstrate some things by experience; we conclude other things by reasoning; and we are certain of other things by believing. We acquire knowledge of temporal things through experience itself, but we rise to knowledge of eternal things sometimes by reasoning and sometimes by believing.⁷⁹

Richard's intention is to arrive at truths about eternal things like God's nature by introducing:

Not only probable but also necessary reasons (*necessarias rationes*) for what we believe and to season the teachings of our faith with an exposition and explanation of truth. I believe without a doubt that, with regard to the explanation of any being that necessarily exists, not only are probable arguments not lacking, but neither are necessary arguments.

For everything which begins to exist in time according to the good pleasure of the Creator, it is possible to exist and possible not to exist. The source and cause of their being is demonstrated by experience rather than concluded by reasoning. But those beings that are eternal absolutely cannot not exist; just as they have never not existed, so certainly they will never not exist, or rather they are always what they are; they cannot be different or otherwise.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Richard of St. Victor. "On the Trinity" 1.1 in *Trinity and Creation*. Coolman, Boyd & Coulter, Dale, eds. New City Press, 2011.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 1.4.

According to Richard, it is thus not merely the case that God happens to be triune if God is indeed triune, but it is necessarily the case that God is triune, for the eternal nature cannot be otherwise than it actually is. The authoritative statements concerning the Trinity for Richard are the creeds (primarily the Athanasian Creed). About the content of the creeds, Richard notes that:

I frequently hear or read all these assertions, but do not recall having read how all these assertions are proven. Authorities abound in all these issues, but argumentations are not equally abundant; proofs (*experimenta*) are lacking in all these assertions and argumentations are rare. Therefore, as I have already said above, I think that I have accomplished something if I am able to assist even to modest degree studious minds in a study of this kind, even if it is not granted that I can satisfy them.⁸¹

Richard is keen to lay out exhaustive disjunctive categories. His procedure is meticulous, emphasizing God's eternity, omnipotence, and love. He notes that every being is generally differentiated in three modes of being: "Everything that is or can be either has its being from eternity or begins to exist in time. Likewise, everything that is or can be either has its beginning from itself or from some source other than itself," and concludes therefore, that the being of "anything existing will either be from eternity and from itself, or, conversely, neither from eternity nor from itself, or, mediately between these two, from eternity but not from itself. Nature itself in no way allows there to be a fourth mode of being."⁸²

Following St. Anselm, Richard views God as "that-than-which-nothing-is-greater and that-than-which-nothing-is-better. Now, without a doubt rational nature is better than irrational nature. Thus, it is necessary for some rational substance to be the highest of all beings."⁸³ For Richard, the highest rational substance is the triune God. Concerning that substance, Richard explains:

⁸¹ Ibid, 1.5.

⁸² Ibid, 1.6.

⁸³ Ibid, 1.11.

That substance which is nothing other than the divinity itself will certainly also be common to multiple persons. According to this, there will certainly be multiple persons, but only one substance, in one divinity. Whether, therefore, it is said that there is only one person or multiple persons in the one divinity, God will still be only one substance.⁸⁴

By distinguishing between substance and person, Richard's Perfect Being Theology importantly demands monotheism (only one substance) and sets the stage nicely for *a priori* arguments that posit the multi-personal nature of that one divine substance. The argument presented in the following section follows this understanding.

Omnipotence plays a crucial role in Richard's account. He holds that it is impossible for several omnipotent beings to exist. "Indeed he who truly is omnipotent can easily be able to render any other power powerless; otherwise he certainly will not be omnipotent...And so, just as there can only be one who is omnipotent, so there can only be one God."⁸⁵ For Richard, the truly omnipotent cannot lack anything that can be desired. "No fullness and no perfection can be lacking where there is omnipotence; otherwise, if God's supreme power were lacking even a little perfection that he could have, then he absolutely would not be omnipotent."⁸⁶ Importantly, it is Richard's understanding, also, that "the supreme being of all cannot be made good or blessed by a being inferior to it."⁸⁷

An omnipotent being would rightly be possessed of goodness and love/charity. Richard really sets his philosophical machinery to work in book three of *On the Trinity* by detailing his view of love. Perfect love must be more than private and more than potential.

The fullness and perfection of all goodness lies in the supreme and universally perfect good. Moreover, where the fullness of all goodness is, true and supreme charity cannot be lacking. Indeed, nothing is better than charity, and nothing is

⁸⁴ Ibid, 1.17.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 1.25.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2.16.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

more perfect than charity. However, no one properly is said to have love on account of private and exclusive love of oneself. And so, it is necessary that *love be directed toward another, so that it can be charity*. Therefore, charity absolutely cannot exist where a plurality of persons is lacking.

Surely God would not be able to have supreme charity toward a created person. After all, his charity would be disordered, if he were loving supremely someone who should not be loved supremely. However, it is impossible that charity be disordered in the supremely wise goodness. And so, a divine person could not have supreme charity toward a person who would not be worthy of supreme love.

As long as someone loves no one else as much as himself, that private love, which he has toward himself, proves that he has not yet apprehended the highest degree of love. But a divine person would surely not have someone whom he could love as worthily as himself, if he absolutely were not having a person of equal dignity. However, a person who was not God would not be of equal dignity to a divine person. There, so that the fullness of charity can occur in true divinity, it is necessary for a divine person not to lack the fellowship with a person of equal dignity and, for that reason, a divine person.

The fullness of divinity cannot be without the fullness of goodness; the fullness of goodness cannot be without the fullness of charity; and the fullness of charity cannot be without the plurality of divine persons.⁸⁸

On Richard's account, since God is the perfect being, God must exercise all the aspects of love/charity. Self-love is not the highest degree of love according to Richard. The distinction between degrees, or aspects of love feature prominently in the argument to be presented below. "A rational life experiences nothing sweeter than the pleasures of charity, and it never enjoys anything more delightful than the delight of charity. A divine person will lack these pleasures in eternity, if he lacks a fellowship and remains isolated on the throne of majesty."⁸⁹ There is no worry about multiple substances occupying the throne of majesty for Richard, since "Each [divine] person has one and the same substance, or, if this sounds better, both together are one and same substance."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid, 3.2.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 3.4.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 3.8.

Private love of oneself does not exhaust the full array of the aspects of love. God must be multi-personal to experience mutual love, but Richard notes another aspect of love—mutual love jointly directed to third party. “Each of the two persons, who is supremely loved and ought to be loved supremely, must seek with equal desire a third person mutually loved (*condilectum*) and must possess him freely with equal concord.”⁹¹ Richard provides further detail:

Certainly if there were only one person in the divinity, then he would not have someone to whom he could communicate the riches of this magnitude; but, conversely, the abundance of pleasures and sweetness, which could have grown in him on account of the acquisition of an intimate love, would be lacking in eternity. But the fullness of goodness does not allow the supremely good one to hoard greedily the riches of his magnitude, nor does the fullness of blessedness allow the supremely blessed one not to obtain the abundance of pleasures and sweetnesses. And, with regard to the magnificence of this honor, he takes as much delight in the bounty of his riches and he glories in the enjoyment of his abundance. You notice from these arguments how impossible it is that any one person in the divinity lacks the fellowship of a fraternity (*consortio societatis*). But if he were possessing only one companion, then certainly he would not lack someone, with whom he could communicate the riches of magnitude, but he absolutely could not have someone with whom he could share the pleasures of charity. Nothing is found to be more pleasant than the sweetness of love; there is nothing in which the mind is more delighted. He alone possesses the pleasure of such sweetness, who does [not] have a companion and lover who is loved mutually (*condilectum*) in the love that was presented to him. And so there absolutely cannot be a communion of love in less than three persons. But, as we have said, there is nothing more glorious and more magnificent than to share in common whatever you have that is useful and pleasant. But this cannot be hidden from supreme wisdom, nor can this be unsatisfying to the supremely powerful or the power of the one supremely happy cannot be lacking in his pleasure, so a third person must be united to two persons in the divinity.⁹²

Richard’s idea is that the supreme degree of love would not have a place in divinity if a third person “were lacking in the plurality of persons; and in only two persons there certainly would not be anyone with whom either of the two persons could communicate the excellent

⁹¹ Ibid, 3.11.

⁹² Ibid, 3.14.

pleasures of his joy.” For this reason, “the consummation of true and supreme goodness cannot subsist without completion of the Trinity.”⁹³

But is the joint love of a third really a different aspect of love and even if it is, couldn't God satisfy the desire for it after creation? Richard explains:

When a third person is loved harmoniously and communally by two people, and when the affection of two is melted together into a single affection for the third by the flames of love. From this description then it is clear that the mutual love for a third person (*condilectio*) would not have a place in divinity itself, if there were only two people, and there were lacking a third. Indeed we are not discussing here any kind of mutual love whatsoever but the supreme mutual love. A creature never merits such a love from the Creator, nor is it ever found worthy of it.⁹⁴

But why must the number of divine persons sharing the one divine substance be limited to three? Richard's answer is not based on love, as is his explanation for the need of three divine persons, but is based on the nature of generation. Concerning the three divine persons, one person (the Father) has his being only from himself, one person (the Son) receives his being from someone other than himself and gives being to another divine person, and one divine person (the Holy Spirit) receives his being from other persons but gives being to no other divine person. Since one divine person just gives, another just receives, and the middle both gives and receives, “a quaternary [of divine persons] is totally excluded. It is clear then that a fourth person absolutely cannot exist in the divine nature.”⁹⁵ The reason is that all modes of being are exhausted by the three divine persons. A fourth divine person cannot have his being from himself (as only one divine person can be the start of the chain, otherwise that divine person from himself would be a different being/substance). So a fourth divine person would either have his being from someone else and give being to someone else, or give being to no one else, but

⁹³ Ibid, 3.18.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 3.19.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 5.15.

there would already be divine persons who fill both of those functions and thus nothing categorically is added by a fourth divine person.⁹⁶

Richard of St. Victor lays out a compelling case for God's nature necessarily being three divine persons in one being based on God being eternal, omnipotent, and loving. Much of Richard of St. Victor's work finds a modern advocate in Richard Swinburne.

Swinburne

Swinburne joins Richard of St. Victor in believing that the triune nature of God can be derived not merely from *a posteriori* considerations found in Scripture but from the *a priori* exercise of reason. In his works *Was Jesus God?* and *The Christian God*, Swinburne sets out to give reasons why, "given that one divine person exists, we should expect there to be a Trinity."⁹⁷

Swinburne explains

Suppose the Father existed alone. For a person to exist alone, when he could cause others to exist and interact with him, would be bad. A divine person is a perfectly good person, and that involves being a loving person. A loving person needs someone to love, and **perfect love is love of an equal**, totally mutual love, which is what is involved in a perfect marriage. While, of course, the love of a parent for a child is of immense value, it is not the love of equals; and what makes it as valuable as it is, is that the parent is seeking to make the child (as she grows up) into an equal. A perfectly good solitary person would seek to bring about another such person, with whom to share all that she has.⁹⁸

No created person can ever become an equal with a divine person, so love of an equal requires more than one divine (eternal/non-created) person. Swinburne follows the traditional trinitarian identification of divine persons, calling the first divine person who has his being from himself the Father and calling the second divine person the Son.

But if the Father only began to cause the existence of the Son at some moment of time, say a trillion trillion years ago, that would be too late: for all eternity before

⁹⁶ Ibid, 5.20.

⁹⁷ Swinburne, Richard. *Was Jesus God?* Oxford University Press, 2010. P. 28.

⁹⁸ Ibid, emphasis in original.

that time he would not have manifested his perfect goodness. At each moment of everlasting time **the Father must always cause the Son to exist**, and so always keep the Son in being. Augustine wrote (On Diverse Questions 83 q.50) that if the Father ‘wished to “beget” the Son [that is, cause the Son to exist], and was unable to do it, he would have been weak; if he was able to do it but did not wish to, he would have failed to do it because of “envy”’ (that is, because he wished to be the only divine person). A solitary God would have been an ungenerous god and so no God.⁹⁹

Swinburne puts a unique spin on the causal relationship. While Richard of St. Victor noted that a divine person either has his being from himself or from someone else, Swinburne understands the causal relationship as reciprocal.

Although the Father is the (eternal) cause of the Son’s existence, and the Son is not the cause of the Father’s existence, they will in a certain sense be mutually dependent on each other. For the Father always to cause the Son to exist would be a unique best act of the Father, and so, since being perfectly good is an essential property of a divine person, the Father will inevitably always cause the Son to exist. Hence the Father would not exist at all unless he caused the Son to exist; and that is why he requires the Son to exist for his own existence. And the perfect goodness of Father and Son means that they love each other without limit.¹⁰⁰

Swinburne explains how a third divine person is necessary.

A twosome can be selfish. A marriage in which husband and wife are interested only in each other and do not seek to spread the love they have for each other is a deficient marriage. (And of course the obvious way, but not the only way, in which they can spread their love is by having children.) **The love of the Father for the Son must include** a wish to cooperate with the Son *in further total sharing with an equal*; and hence the need for a third member of the Trinity, whom, following tradition, we may call *the Holy Spirit*, whom they will love and by whom they will be loved. A universe in which there was only sharing and not cooperation in further sharing would have been a deficient universe; it would have lacked a certain kind of goodness. The Father and the Son would have been less than perfectly good unless they sought to spread their mutual love of cooperating in further sharing with an equal.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid, 29, emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, emphasis in original.

So there must be three divine persons on Swinburne's account based on cooperative sharing with an equal. Only a divine person can be an equal, and Swinburne defines divine persons precisely as "necessarily perfectly free, omniscient, omnipotent, and existing of metaphysical necessity."¹⁰² Swinburne anticipates worry surrounding omnipotence and how that impacts freedom and asks, "Would not the omnipotence of one such individual be subject to frustration by the other individual and so not be omnipotence?"¹⁰³ Swinburne calls a divine person omnipotent with regard to *compatibilist power* if that person has "the power to do anything logically possible, if he so chooses" and omnipotent with regard to absolute power if that person has "the power to choose and do, and that is limited not merely by logical possibilities but by perfect goodness."¹⁰⁴ Since a divine person is perfectly good, no conflict between divine persons could emerge on the basis of disagreements concerning actions that are either morally required or morally impermissible since all divine persons will necessarily agree about such actions. Swinburne worries about potential conflicts that could possibly emerge concerning actions that are not morally required, but are still morally good.

Even though they are each perfectly good, will not one try to do one equal best act while another tries to do an incompatible equal best act? Maybe the Father will try to make Uranus rotate in the same direction as the other planets while the Son tries to make Uranus rotate in a different direction (which looks like an equally good action). They cannot both succeed. The only way in which conflict can be avoided is if each of the three persons sees themselves as having at any one time different spheres of activity. Then each could be omnipotent, but there would be no conflict because in virtue of their perfect goodness no divine person would try to do an act of a kind which would be incompatible with an act which another divine person was trying to do. Each would be omnipotent in that, for example, if he chooses to make Uranus rotate in a clockwise direction, he would succeed; but only one would choose to do so. The Father brings about, sustains, and eliminates things in one sphere of activity, the Son does this in another sphere, and the Spirit does this in a third sphere.

¹⁰² Swinburne, Richard. *The Christian God*. Clarendon Press, 1994. P. 171.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

But what could determine which divine person had which sphere of activity? Persons caused to exist by another person have obligations to the person whom caused them. So **the Father**, being perfectly good, will seek to avoid any conflict by **laying down for each divine person his sphere of activity**; and the others, being perfectly good will recognize an obligation to conform to this rule. So there will be no possibility of conflict.¹⁰⁵

Swinburne sees the various spheres of activity laid out by the Father as the means by which “each would recognize a duty not to prevent or frustrate the acts of the other...Only if one lays down what the rules are, and his decision is accepted because he has the authority to law down the rules, will the collision necessarily be avoided.”¹⁰⁶ Does this mean that the other divine persons are less necessary than the first? Not at all, according to Swinburne:

Since the perfect goodness of the Father requires the other two persons to exist just as inevitably as the Father exists, they are what I call ‘metaphysically necessary’. I define a being as ‘metaphysically necessary’ if either it is ontologically necessary or it is inevitably caused to exist by an ontologically necessary being. Their equal inevitable existence makes the members of the Trinity equally worthy of worship. **All three members of the Trinity are metaphysically necessary persons, but the Father alone is ontologically necessary.** And the whole Trinity is ontologically necessary because nothing else caused it to exist.¹⁰⁷

Swinburne lays out a very detailed account of the cooperative activity of the divine persons based on metaphysical and ontological necessity which seems consistent with Richard’s account of the chain of causation. As applied to Richard’s account, the Father who has his being from himself is ontologically necessary, and both the Son who receives his being from someone else and gives being to someone else, and the Spirit, who receives his being from two sources, are both metaphysically necessary. Necessity on both Richard’s and Swinburne’s accounts similarly describe why the number of necessary persons stops at three. Swinburne explains:

¹⁰⁵ *Was Jesus God?* 30, emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁶ *Christian God*, 172-73.

¹⁰⁷ *Was Jesus God?* 31, emphasis in original.

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 sharing, giving to the other what of one's own good 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...Love must share and love must co-operate in sharing. 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...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.¹⁰⁸

Swinburne goes on to explain in more detail:

So **why only three divine persons?** Do not these arguments suggest that there should be more than three divine persons, perhaps an infinite number? I claimed in Chapter 1 that when there is a unique best action, God must do that; and when there is a best kind of action, God must do an action of that kind. Now, bringing about the sharing of divinity is a best kind of action and so is bringing about cooperation in sharing of divinity. But there is no comparable best kind of action which would be achieved by bringing about a fourth person. Bringing about cooperating in sharing with a fourth person is not a qualitatively different kind of good action from bringing about cooperating in sharing with a third person. Or, to use Richard of St Victor's further point, bringing about the Spirit as well as the Son would provide for each divine person someone other than themselves for every other divine person to love and be loved by; but **adding a fourth would not provide a new kind of good state.**

You might think, nevertheless, that, for the above reasons the more divine persons the better. In that case, since however many divine persons the Father (in conjunction with others) brought about, it would be still better if he brought about more. But, we saw in Chapter 1, when a person has the choice of doing one of a series of incompatible actions, each better than the previous one and no best act, he would be perfectly good if he did any one of these acts. (To bring about only three divine persons would be incompatible with an alternative action of bring about only four divine persons, and so generally.) So the perfect goodness of the Father would be satisfied by his bringing about only two further divine persons. He does not have to bring about a fourth divine person in order to fulfill his divine nature. But then **any fourth divine person would not exist necessarily**, even in the sense of metaphysical necessity. His existence would not be a necessary consequence of the existence of an ontological necessary being; and hence he

¹⁰⁸ *The Christian God*, 177-78.

would not be divine. So there cannot be a fourth divine person. There must be and can only be three divine persons.¹⁰⁹

Swinburne affirms three divine persons and no more, since a fourth person could not be divine according to his view of ontological and metaphysical necessity. He clearly argues for exactly three persons, but what is unclear on Swinburne's account is how many gods there are? Do the three persons constitute three beings/substances? Swinburne wants to follow the creeds and presents the following analysis of a central creedal claim.

If [the creedal affirmation that] 'there is only one God' meant 'there is only one divine individual', then the doctrine of the Trinity would be manifestly self-contradictory...[But] no person and no Council affirming something which they intend to be taken with utter seriousness can be read as affirming an *evident* contradiction.¹¹⁰

Swinburne contends that when denying tritheism, "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."¹¹¹ Swinburne's claim that creeds deny three *independent* divine beings seems to indicate that he endorses three divine beings who are dependent on each other. While the matter of independence/dependence is significant, if there are three beings, there are three substances, which opens Swinburne to the charge of tritheism. Swinburne sums up and defends his position in Social Trinitarian terms.

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 independent 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...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

¹⁰⁹ *Was Jesus God?* 33, emphasis on original.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 180.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

said to have them as well. If all members of a group know something, the group itself, by very natural extension of use, can be said to know that thing, and so on. Similarly this very string 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 be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity. The claim that each individual is “God” should be understood 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 the claim that an individual is God?”¹¹²

Swinburne seems to describe the unity of the persons as the threefold instantiation of an abstract, universal essence—divinity. For each divine person, there is a distinct trope of the divine nature held by a specific being. Since there are three divine persons, Swinburne seems to indicate that there are three divine beings. If he means that there are three beings, the charge of tritheism may find its mark. This seems to be just what Swinburne means by claiming of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that “each is divine—omnipotent, perfectly good, etc. Each such *being* would be an all-perfect source of all things.”¹¹³ Perhaps Swinburne is errantly less than precise here, and he really means to say, “each such *person*,” which would help alleviate the charge of tritheism. It seems that if the divine nature includes the property *being triune*, it is best to speak only of one being who is tri-personal and not to speak of three beings. Even if speaking of three persons, however, if the divine nature is instantiated by each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the specter of tritheism lingers. After all, if there are three instantiations of the divine nature, the property of *being triune* cannot be essential to that nature for none of the persons is triune. It seems better to understand the unity of God in terms of God’s being one soul/substance composed of the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each of whom possess the property of being a divine person—is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good,

¹¹² Ibid, 180-81.

¹¹³ Ibid, 181, emphasis added.

eternal, and necessary. This posits a distinction between the full and complete divine nature, which includes being triune, and being a divine person. The trinitarian model defended in Part III will seek to explain how this distinction is cashed out.

Davis

Stephen Davis is another contemporary scholar who believes that *a priori* considerations can demonstrate multiple divine persons are inherent to God's nature. His aim is to defend the Social Trinitarian view of the Trinity and to show that the one divine substance could support multiple divine persons. His argument does not seek to demonstrate that God is *three* persons, only that God may be multi-personal. His argument is as follows:

- (1) Necessarily, God is perfect, and perfect in love (I John 4:8).
- (2) Necessarily, if God does not experience love of another, God is imperfect.
- (3) Therefore, necessarily, God experiences love of another. ((1), (2))
- (4) Necessarily, it is possible that only God exists (i.e., that God does not create).
- (5) Necessarily, if ST is false, there is no "other" in the Godhead.
- (6) Necessarily, if God alone exists, and if ST is false, then God does not experience love of another, and thus is not perfect. ((2), (4), (5))
- (7) Therefore, necessarily, ST is true. ((4), (6))¹¹⁴

The argument is valid, but is it sound? The first premise is on solid ground. Not only does Davis include Christian scriptural attestation, but the content of the premise is central to Perfect Being Theology and can only be attacked if being perfect in love is not an essential component of being perfect. Premise Two seems to be the place where most criticism would focus. Davis defends this premise by noting that

Now love of oneself is surely a good...Still, it seems obvious (at least to me) that love of *another person* is also a very great good. It seems that a God who does not and cannot love another has missed out on something high and wonderful. There would be a deficiency in God. God would be less than perfect. (The same would be true of any great good that can be logically experienced by an

¹¹⁴ Davis, Stephen. Perichoretic Monotheism: A Defense of a Social Theory of the Trinity in the journal *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue* 2003, 35-52. P. 39.

omnipotent and perfectly good being: if God were not to experience beauty or justice, that would be a deficiency in God.) And so premise (2) is true.¹¹⁵

Davis is not out to accomplish the same thing as Richard or Swinburne. Davis is not presenting a fully articulated defense of *a priori* trinitarian theorizing. Rather, he is collecting reasons to support the Social Trinitarian view. He should not be criticized for having a different aim, nor should he be held to the same standard of precision expected from those advancing a more robust *a priori* trinitarian approach.

Davis is less than precise in his explanation and defense of Premise Two. Not all great goods must be experienced by an omnipotent and perfectly good being for that being to still count as perfect inherently. There are many goods which can only be experienced after creating. If beauty and justice and love of another person are logically possibly experienced even having never created, then a being who lacked them could not be perfect. Missing out on things high and wonderful only strike against a being's perfection if those high and wonderful things are logically possible apart from creating. Davis seems to contend that they are possible apart from creation by invoking Premise Four. God is still God even if God does not create.

Davis' argument seems sound as well. Since the scope of his argument does not serve to specify or limit the number of divine persons, the argument's utility is not as great, however, as the others under consideration.

Richard of St. Victor was the first to articulate a philosophically robust *a priori* trinitarian approach making use of divine love and omnipotence while attempting to prove that God's nature must be triune. Richard Swinburne advances many of the same methods, but provides a unique view on the causal reciprocity of the divine persons. Neither Richard, nor Swinburne

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 40.

present their views as tight analytical arguments, as does Davis. Is there a formally structured argument that capitalizes on omnipotence which proves that God's nature includes exactly and exclusively three divine persons and that avoids the causal reciprocity of Swinburne's approach? Consider the argument in the following section.

Section III—Kirschner's Formulation of an *A Priori* Argument for the Trinity

Kirschner's Formulation of an *A Priori* Love Argument:

1. God is the Greatest Conceivable Being (GCB).
2. Any great-making property God/GCB possesses must be possessed to a maximal degree essentially.
3. Love/benevolence is a great-making property God/GCB possesses.
4. Maximal love/benevolence includes self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared (cooperative love of a third).
5. A singularly personal being cannot possess love-given, love-received, or love-shared essentially.
6. A dually personal being cannot possess love-shared essentially.
7. Therefore, God/GCB must be at least a tri-personal being.
8. Simplicity is a great-making property.
9. Being tri-personal is the simplest way to possess maximal love/benevolence.
10. No other great-making property requires the GCB be multi-personal.
11. Therefore, God/GCB is a tri-personal being.

This argument seeks to demonstrate the Trinity on *a priori* grounds. It assumes Perfect Being Theology and defines God as the greatest conceivable being. If God is other than the GCB, this argument is a non-starter, but with such an assumption in place, this argument seems sound. The only great-making properties under consideration are love/benevolence and simplicity. Importantly, love is construed in a very precise way. This construal is not an *ad hoc* means by which one might cram triunity into the concept of God, but is a result of conceptually mapping the notion of love. The main thrust of the argument is that any being possessing maximal love must possess (be capable of actualizing) the variously unique categorical aspects of love in his essence, but neither a singularly personal nor a dually personal being can possess

all the aspects of love. Such beings would need to first create something else to love, but this would mean that such beings would only be potentially maximally loving essentially. A being who only potentially possesses the great-making property of maximal love is not the GCB since possessing maximal love is a great-making property and a being who can possess maximal love can be conceived. The great-making property of simplicity is invoked as a natural response to idea that perhaps the concept of God is enhanced by exponentially multiplying the persons within God. An infinitely personal being, however, is no greater than a tri-personal being as no great-making property requires the GCB be more than tri-personal which means that the great-making properties of simplicity and maximal love are only secured by a tri-personal conception of God. This demonstrates that only a tri-personal concept of God can count as the GCB essentially.

The argument is valid, but is it sound? The argument must be assessed. Consider:

1. God is the Greatest Conceivable Being (GCB).

This is a stipulated definition claiming that whatever constitutes the greatest conceivable being, “God” is the appropriate appellation of that being. Just as a *vixen* and *female fox* identify the same concept, so *God* and *Greatest Conceivable Being* identify the same concept. One may have reason to doubt that a particular conception of God is the GCB, but this argument does not start with a particular conception of God, but rather seeks to understand the very concept of what the GCB must be and then says that one’s understanding of *God* should line up with that concept. It may be argued that no intelligible concept of a perfect being is conceivable, but objections to that effect are challenges to any argument assuming Perfect Being Theology, not a specific challenge to this argument. If the other premises are true, this argument still presents a credible

a priori line of thought to commend Trinitarianism within the theological context of Perfect Being Theology.

Consider: 2. Any great-making property God/GCB possesses must be possessed to a maximal degree essentially.

This premise builds on the definition in 1. It is not enough that the GCB possess certain great-making properties. The GCB must possess those great-making properties to a maximal degree. If strength is an aspect located in the great-making property *power*, then the GCB must be maximally strong. The reason for this is obvious. If Andrew can lift 100 pounds and Brian can lift 50 pounds, then Andrew is stronger than Brian and is greater than Brian in terms of strength. But Andrew is not the strongest conceivable being. The Hulk can lift 100 million tons. This means that the Hulk is greater than Andrew in terms of strength. Superman, however, can lift 600 quintillion tons, so Superman is greater than the Hulk in terms of strength. But it is conceivable to imagine a being lifting more than even Superman can lift. Such a being would be greater than Superman in terms of strength. The GCB is all-powerful and thus can lift any and every amount, making the GCB maximally strong. No being can be stronger than maximally strong, so any being under consideration as the GCB must be maximally strong or else someone could conceive of a stronger being, making *that* being the GCB, provided maximal strength is compossible with the other great-making properties.

It will not do to say that the GCB possesses great-making properties but to less than a maximal degree. Such a concept is illogical given the concept of the GCB. Whatever great-making property, *P*, is predicated of the GCB, that property must be maximized. Such maximization will either take the form of the GCB possessing *all-P* simpliciter, or the form of

the GCB possessing *the most P* that is compossible with other great-making properties. Either form of predication is an acceptable rendering of ‘possessed to a maximal degree.’¹¹⁶

The great-making properties the GCB possesses must be possessed to a maximal degree *essentially*. This means that the GCB cannot merely possess a great-making property potentially such that some set of circumstances must obtain prior to the GCB possessing that great-making property to a maximal degree. The idea is that the GCB is the GCB in its essence. If God has to create something prior to possessing a property that is necessary to his status as GCB, then God possesses that property only potentially, not essentially and is therefore not the GCB if another being can be conceived which possesses maximally all necessary great-making properties required of the GCB and possesses them essentially. The difference is one of modality. A being who possesses a great-making property essentially possesses that property in every possible world, but a being who possesses a great-making property potentially/contingently, possesses that property only in certain worlds—worlds in which that being first brings about the circumstances needed to actualize that property.

Not all great-making properties must be possessed essentially by God to be the GCB. The lack of certain great-making properties does not diminish God as the GCB so long as those great-making properties are not necessary for the GCB to be the perfect being essentially. For instance, many within the Christian worldview understand God to be the redeemer of those humans who accept God’s grace. Being the redeemer is certainly a great-making property, but it is not one required to be the GCB. God does not have to redeem anybody to be the GCB. To some theists, this may sound blasphemous in isolation, but it is perfectly reasonable in context. God cannot redeem anybody unless there is somebody in need of redemption. The persons of

¹¹⁶ See omnipotence discussion in previous section.

the Trinity who comprise God are perfect and require no redemption. This means that God is not the redeemer (does not possess the great-making property of being the redeemer) in his essence. God would only potentially be the redeemer in his essence. God would first need to create and then at least one of his creation would need to become in need of redemption for God to actualize the potentially held great-making property of being the redeemer. God is free not to create, and if God so chose, that choice would not diminish his status as GCB. It would only mean that those great-making properties not essentially held are potentially held and would remain potentially held if God continued not to create. Once God chooses to create, and his creation is in need of redemption, then God would have to exercise the great-making property of being the redeemer to retain his status as GCB.

Being the redeemer is a great-making property, but not one that a being must possess to be the GCB in his essence. Any great-making property that a being must possess in his essence to be the GCB must be held to maximal degree for the being truly to be considered the GCB.

Consider: 3. Love/benevolence is a great-making property God/GCB possesses.

A being's greatness is enhanced when the property *love* is predicated of that being, but is diminished when the property *love* is not predicated of that being. Love is a moral good universally endorsed. A being without love cannot be morally perfect or good. Is moral goodness a boon to a being's greatness? Moral goodness certainly does not diminish a being in terms of greatness, even if moral goodness is often seen (by bad guys, for instance) as a diminution of strength. This is because moral goodness serves as a governor for actions. Take for example, Superman battling the misguided and morally deficient General Zod and his army of Kryptonians. General Zod and his Lieutenant, Faora, mock Superman's love of the human

people. Zod says that Superman's care for common people is a "weakness."¹¹⁷ and Faora agrees commenting, "You're weak, son of El. The fact that you possess a sense of morality and we do not gives us an evolutionary advantage...For every human you save, we will kill a million more."¹¹⁸ Superman is not as ruthless as Zod and Faora, but is just as strong physically and is superior morally, making him a greater being.

So it is for all beings who are good compared to those without a sense of morality. Good is logically prior to evil in that evil is defined by its distance from good. Good can exist without evil, but evil cannot exist without good, and so a being who is all-good is greater than one who is all-evil or just not all-good. A being without love/benevolence is not as great as a being who possesses love/benevolence, securing love/benevolence as a great-making property necessary of the GCB.

Consider: 4. Maximal love/benevolence includes self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared (cooperative love of a third).

To assess the notion of maximal love, one must understand the nature of love. Consider what it is to love. A person can be said (1) to love baseball, (2) to love justice, (3) or to love one's spouse, and yet something very different is meant by (1), (2), and (3). (1) may be understood to mean that a person very much enjoys baseball. In this same sense, one can love donuts, reading comic books, swimming, etc. (2) may be understood to mean that a person values the concept and results of justice. In this same sense, one can love freedom, security, loyalty, etc. (3) is importantly different from merely liking or enjoying something or some

¹¹⁷ See the motion picture *Superman II* for General Zod, portrayed by Terrance Stamp, making this claim to Superman just before the beginning of the climactic battle.

¹¹⁸ See the motion picture *Man of Steel* for Faora, portrayed by Antje Traue, making this claim and attendant threat to Superman.

activity and from valuing concepts either as ends or for the ends they produce. (3) involves caring about another person as that person is, for her own sake. In this sense, a person can love his spouse, his children, his friend, his coworker, etc. This sort of personal love will be the focus moving forward.

The language of personal love, restricted though it is, still equivocates when deploying the term “love.” Distinctions are needed to adequately make sense of the various modes of personal love. Certainly the love a mother has for her child is different (or at least differently expressed) from the love she has for her spouse. While both may involve caring about the other person as that person is for that person’s sake, and while both may involve physical elements, those expressions will be wildly different. This is because the nature of care is itself a vast landscape.

Concerning humans, *eros*/sexual desire, often expressed as passionate longing for another person, and *philia*/affectionate regard or friendly feelings toward another person, both seem to consist of appropriate responses to the positive qualities in one’s beloved. *Agape*/choosing to see or bestow value in another human person, not on the basis of the positive qualities of the person, but on the basis of an awareness of the ontological similitude of other persons, also results in appropriate responses to other persons. While these might be three various ways to express love, it seems that something common unites them all under the banner of love.

Love seems to involve care, concern, valuing, and affection.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ The primary ways in which love is described and discussed philosophically seem to center around the following three areas: love as union, love as care/concern, and love as valuing. Love as union involves the creation of an affectionate “we” community. Aristotle, Hegel, Solomon, Scruton, Nozick, Fisher, and Delaney all present views of love that include the formation of a community. The love as concern view takes as central caring about the beloved for her sake. Taylor, Newton-Smith, Sobel, LaFollette, Frankfurt, and White each advance this notion. Love as valuing takes two tacks. Velleman is representative of the appraisal view of love, which understands love to be fundamentally a matter of acknowledging and responding in a distinctive

The examples used to describe this care, concern, valuing, and affection so far have all involved human persons loving other human persons. But love is not restricted exclusively to human persons. Theistic worldviews posit that God loves. If personal love is open to God, then the nature of love goes beyond what can be described using exclusively human examples.

Divine love and human love share many aspects according to theistic worldviews. Human love, however, is a more diverse landscape than divine love since it involves so many aspects that are physical in nature, whereas God is incorporeal. To effectively map love conceptually, one must zoom-out from one's own human perspective which so often concentrates on the human-centric facets of love. As one zooms-out, away from the very precise aspects of applied parental love, or the vast complexities of sexually erotic love, one sees a map that does not show specific streets or elevations markers, but sees counties which comprise a state, then states which comprise regions, then regions which comprise continents, and finally continents which comprise the terrestrial map. What are the largest and broadest categories of the concept love? What individuates the continents of the fully zoomed-out map of the concept of love? Just as the continents of a global map are land masses, and each continent is a uniquely shaped land mass, the uniquely distinct aspects of love are comprised of something. Love seems to be care, concern, valuing, and affection for something. All the continents on the conceptual map of love are comprised of care, concern, valuing, and affection, and yet each continent is unique.

Every aspect of personal love is comprised of these four elements and can be conceptually grouped into unique continents that allow for the vast array of variously expressed

way to the value of the beloved. Singer is representative of the bestowal view which understands love to be fundamentally a matter of bestowing value on the beloved.

examples of love to be discovered. Concerning the nature of personal love, it seems there are only four qualitatively unique ways in which to express care, concern, valuing, and affection. Every example of personal love, however construed, is an expression of one of the following four aspects: self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared.

Personal agents can care for themselves, can be concerned with one's own well-being, value one's self, and like one's self. Personal agents can also care for other persons, be concerned for other persons, value other persons, and shower affection on other persons. Personal agents can, likewise, receive care, concern, value, and affection from other persons. Reciprocal love, when directed at a different person forms a qualitatively unique form of love—love-shared. The love two persons have for each other is not merely intensified, but transformed, as they share the love of another, for the two unite jointly to love another that is not either of the two.

Imagine, then, the conceptual map of personal love. The nature of love is to care for, show concern for, value, and show affection to a person. There are four continents on this map, each of which is similarly comprised, but uniquely shaped. The continent of Self-Love has a divine region where God loves himself. This region will be thoroughly explored later, but God can value himself both essentially and in terms of recognizing a uniqueness distinct from anything he creates. There is also a human region where human persons love themselves. The ways in which human persons love themselves are variously expressed. Going back to school, taking aspirin, exercising, masturbating, going on a diet, indulging in just one more donut, etc. can all be examples of self-love, yet the nature of self-love will always be the same. Each example of self-love will either involve care, concern, valuing, or affection for one's self. The expression of this love will vary according to age, stage of development, cultural customs, etc.

The continent of Love-Given also has a divine region, where God, at least according to the Christian worldview, creates human persons in God's own image, values human persons in virtue of being so created, loves human persons so much that whichever human persons believe in God will be saved, indwells human persons who believe the Gospel, and inspired the Bible to inform and guide human persons. The continent also has a human region in which is located the state of loving other humans in the various ways (romance, admiration, good will, marriage, sex, friendship, parenting, etc.). This region also includes the state of loving God in the various ways available to humans. The continent of Love-Received, likewise, has a divine region and human region. Rather than giving love, on this continent, God receives love and human persons receive love. While different continents, Love-Given and Love-Received have coastlines that look like puzzle pieces that would fit together, much like Africa and South America look like they fit together.

Lastly, is the continent of Love-Shared. The divine region of this continent will be explored thoroughly in the assessment of premises 5 and 6. The human region is expressed in various ways. For example, when two parents (who reciprocate love for each other) both share in loving their child, something unique happens. The third person is loved harmoniously and jointly by two others who also love each other and the care, concern, valuing, and affection of the two is fused into a community of care, concern, valuing, and affection by their love for a third and for each other. This community emerges as a result of shared love for a third. This is in opposition to two persons who each love a third, but do not love each other. This union of two lovers sharing in love for a third creates a "we" community unique from that which exists on the Love-Given continent when two persons both independently love a third. If those independent lovers of a third person love each other, then they have traveled to the Love-Shared continent.

The myriad expressions of personal love all seem to land on one or more of these continents. Every sort of personal love seems to be an example of either self-love, love-given, love-received, or love-shared.

Maximal love involves the possession of each unique sort of love. A being could still possess the great-making property of love/benevolence essentially even if that being did not possess love/benevolence maximally. Such a being, however, would not be as great as one who did possess love/benevolence maximally and thus would not be a viable candidate for GCB status. Such a being would not be as great as one who possesses love/benevolence maximally as long as maximal love/benevolence is possible to be possessed essentially. If it is possible for a conceivable being to possess maximal love/benevolence essentially and a being under consideration fails to do so, then there is another conceivable being who is greater in terms of love/benevolence. The being under consideration could not be the GCB in light of this deficiency.

Consider: 5. A singularly personal being cannot possess love-given, love-received, or love-shared essentially.

Love-given and love-received require at least two persons to obtain. A property is not maximally possessed essentially if it does not obtain. Any property that a being possibly possesses but does not obtain is merely a potential property, not an essential one. Such properties are contingent upon some other set of circumstances obtaining. This means that while God is maximally powerful/omnipotent, the possession of omnipotence is not the ability to do absolutely anything at all that can be done because many things that God could do require that other things be done first. This renders those things God could do, but that require other things be done first, to contingent status. This is no diminution of power, however. It merely renders

certain aspects of omnipotence contingent and not able to be actualized essentially. What about dispositional properties or dispositional aspects of properties? A dispositional property is the ability to affect or be affected by something else. A dispositional property can be held essentially but is still possessed contingently in terms of modality. A person may be disposed to love other persons, but if no other persons exist to love, the first person does not possess love-given essentially, but potentially/contingently/dispositionally. Essential properties cannot be shut off or withheld. It is never the case that the GCB can throttle back a great-making property from being possessed maximally to being possessed in a lesser way since another conceivable being—one exactly similar but who possesses the same great-making property maximally is conceivable and such a being would be greater in terms of that property. By definition, it is never the case the GCB possess a great-making property essentially in less than a maximal way if that great-making property is possibly possessed maximally and essentially.

The only aspect of love/benevolence that a singularly personal being can possess essentially is self-love since this is the only qualitatively unique aspect of love that requires only one person. For such a being to possess love-given and love-received, that being would first need to create another person to love. Such a need prevents possession of maximal love/benevolence essentially because such possession is dependent upon the being exercising a certain other potential great-making property—creating. This relegates possession of love/benevolence to potential status for the singularly personal being. Such a being could still be disposed to love others, but that disposition does not constitute maximal possession of love/benevolence if it is possible for a different being to actualize all aspects of love essentially. A tri-personal being can actualize all the aspects of love essentially and is conceivable. Even if a singularly personal being utilized his omniscience to perfectly imagine what it would be like to

love another person and/or receive love from another person (which an omniscient singularly personal being certainly could do) such imaginings constitute only potential possession of those aspects, not maximal possession of them essentially.

Consider: 6. A dually personal being cannot possess love-shared essentially.

Love-shared requires at least three persons to obtain. A dually personal being can possess self-love, love-given, and love-received essentially, but cannot possess love-shared until that being creates another person. Such a dually personal being possessed of the first three aspects of love is certainly disposed to love as evidenced by the two persons loving themselves and each other, but possessing the disposition for love-shared is not possessing shared-love essentially. Such a dually personal being would possess love-shared potentially. Such a being would be great, no doubt, but not as great as a being able to possess self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared essentially. The possession of maximal love/benevolence requires the actualizing of all the aspects of love essentially, but a dually personal being does not possess love-shared necessarily/essentially, only contingently.

Consider: 7. Therefore, God/GCB must be at least a tri-personal being.

7 is guaranteed to be true if 1-6 are true. Maximal possession of love/benevolence requires possession of all four aspects of love essentially. A being may possess love/benevolence in a contingent way, but that being is not the GCB. A singularly personal being can be disposed to possess/actualize love-given, love-received, and love-shared, but does not actually possess them essentially. Such a being would possess them contingently/dispositionally. Such a being is great, but not as great as a being who maximally possesses all aspects of love essentially. A dually personal being may possess love/benevolence in a contingent way, but that being is not the GCB. A dually personal being can be disposed to

possess/actualize love-shared, but does not actually possess love-shared essentially. Such a being would have to choose to bring about a third person and thus would possess love-shared contingently/dispositionally, which is not as great as a being who maximally possesses all aspects of love essentially.

Consider: 8. Simplicity is a great-making property.

Simplicity here is not the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity as understood in post creedal Christianity and still endorsed by some Christian theists today.¹²⁰ The doctrine of divine simplicity, so understood, says that God is without parts—physical parts, metaphysical parts, predicatable parts, etc. essentially. God cannot have physical parts, obviously, as God is incorporeal essentially. But the very strong form of simplicity also seeks to preclude God from possessing unique attributes. The doctrine equates God's existence with God's essence. The doctrine holds that God does not possess properties, but *is* those properties. Accordingly, God is said not to have power, but to be power; not to have love, but to be love, etc. Furthermore, the strong form of the doctrine of divine simplicity claims that the qualities of God are indistinguishable and indivisible, such that God's power is identical to God's love, which is identical to God's eternity, etc.

What is meant by simplicity in this argument is not what is claimed by the traditionally understood strong doctrine of divine simplicity. That doctrine presents problems of incoherence. Eternality is a part of God's nature, but eternity is not the same property as omnipotence. The Athanasian Creed predicates eternity of God and separately predicates omnipotence of God.

¹²⁰ The doctrine of divine simplicity, while endorsed by thinkers like Augustine, Aquinas, and contemporarily by Dolezal, etc., in its strong form is rejected in favor of a more philosophically coherent understanding of simplicity by thinkers like William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, J.I. Packer, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Frame, etc.

While eternity and omnipotence are compossible and are possessed by the GCB essentially, some conceivable being may be omnipotent but lack eternity. It seems that to stretch simplicity so far as to make all of God's properties identical is too far a stretch. While God possesses those properties necessarily, and while those properties do not seem predicated of any other actual being, these should not be reasons to preclude distinctions between properties since they can be distinguished via thought experiments.

The doctrine also seems to demand that God have no properties distinct from his nature. Such a claim posits that the essential properties of God are necessary and are never latent. That seems right, but such a claim also seems to demand that God have no potential properties, which seems wrong. On this view God is the pure act of being. God is eternal, necessary, omnipotent, etc. in a will-independent way. God never chooses to exercise or withhold these properties. Yet, many properties God displays seem willed by God. For instance, God is not the redeemer essentially. God becomes the redeemer when he, in fact, redeems something. It seems that redeeming is a choice that God makes (as is creating anything at all) but it also seems that God could refrain from ever creating anything in the first place and in so doing also refrain from redeeming anyone. Such potential properties seem to demonstrate that God's properties can be distinguished from his nature.

Simplicity is a great-making property but is not the same as the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, which claims that God has no parts, physical or metaphysical, that all of God's properties are identical to each other, and that God's existence is identical to his existence. Rather, Simplicity here is understood as efficiency in aseity. Aseity is the property of independent self-existence and sufficiency. Such a being exists in and of itself, with no reliance on external circumstances. Simplicity is possessed if a being exists in the least complex manner

of subsistence. This means that if a being required certain aspects necessary for possession of a particular great-making property required for GCB status, that being would have those aspects internally and in the most efficient manner possible.

Remember that simplicity here makes no stipulation about parts and does not identify God's properties with each other but does require that they be will-independent. A being who chooses to exemplify a great-making property could choose to do otherwise. In those worlds where a being chose not to exemplify such properties, that being would not be as great as an exactly similar being who did choose to exemplify them. If a being is a necessary being, then that being's existence and essence cannot be pulled apart. If God necessarily exists, then God exists in all possible worlds, and in each of those worlds, God's essence is the same. As a necessary being, what distinguishes those worlds from each other is not the presence of God, or the nature of God essentially, but God's chosen exemplification of God's potential properties (like creation, and the attendant actualities that follow creating beings with free will). God's essential properties are necessary to God and since necessary existence is a property of God, God's existence and God's essence are co-extensional, but God is free to choose not to create anything at all. God's essence is the same across all possible worlds regardless if God creates or not, which demonstrates the distinctness of divine attributes.

The GCB requires nothing external from itself to exist or to possess the best combination of great-making properties. If a being needed something external to itself to possess a great-making property, then that being does not possess the property in question essentially, but only potentially. Such a being is not as great a being who possesses that great-making property essentially, so simplicity first requires aseity. Simplicity also requires efficiency in that aseity. Efficiency is the avoidance of redundancy and *unnecessary* composition, not the avoidance of

any composition. If neither a singularly personal being, nor a dually personal being can possess maximal love/benevolence, and love is a great-making property, then the GCB must be at least tri-personal. But why stop there? Perhaps the GCB is quad-personal, or even infinitely-personal? This is impossible if simplicity is a great-making property.

The need for possession of maximal love requires three persons. What is the requirement for a fourth? Even if it were to benefit the GCB to experience love-given, love-received, and love-shared with additional persons, that benefit would only be quantitative, not qualitative. This means that a fourth person is unnecessarily redundant. A quad-personal being would be comprised of four persons, but one of those person would serve no unique function. This reduplication adds nothing to the greatness of the being, even if it benefits the persons comprising the being in a quantitative way. It may be quantitatively enjoyable to possess love-given, love-received, and love-shared with additional persons, but it is not greater to do so. The possession of maximal love is secured by a being comprised of three persons. In fact, if unnecessary personal reduplication were somehow to add to the greatness of a being, the GCB would have to be infinitely-personal essentially, which may be absurd given the seemingly absurd implications of an actually infinite set.

If a being has to create in order to possess a needed great-making property maximally, that being cannot be the GCB. A being needs to be tri-personal to possess love maximally. If a being is quad-(or more)-personal, that being is not greater in terms of possession of love, and is less efficient and so the tri-personal being is greater in terms of possession of simplicity. But is simplicity really a great-making property? It certainly seems so. It diminishes a being to be comprised, in part, of *unnecessary* persons. That greatness includes simple efficiency is intuitive. The case against simplicity as a great-making property is counterintuitive and would

still require an appeal to aseity, but then also require making the bizarre case for unnecessary personal reduplication as something other than a diminution of greatness. If the personal reduplication were necessary for some other great-making property to be possessed maximally, then simplicity would be secured if the being in question was comprised of the number of persons needed to secure that other property. No great-making property other than maximal love seems to require multiple persons. Simplicity would only be abandoned if that being were comprised of some number of unnecessary persons in addition to the number required of that other property. And then the question reemerges, *what is the point of those persons?* They are not needed. A being of maximal stream-lined efficient aseity is greater than a being of unnecessary redundancies. In fact, unnecessary redundancy is not even compatible with necessary existence since the non-necessary persons cannot, by definition, be a part of the being's essence. The being in question would be at least tri-personal in every possible world, but be quad-(or more)-personal in some other worlds, but not all other worlds, essentially which is a contradictory. So it will not do to say that the GCB could be quad-(or more)-personal. Efficiency is a great-making property, and seems even to be a necessary one.

Consider: 9. Being tri-personal is the simplest way to possess maximal love/benevolence.

Possession of maximal love/benevolence requires being at least tri-personal. Being quad-(or more)-personal is unnecessary and redundant. Therefore, being tri-personal is the simplest way to possess maximal love/benevolence. Since simplicity is a great-making property, it must be possessed in a maximal way. When considering love, maximal simplicity is secured by a tri-personal being.

Consider 10. No other great-making property requires the GCB be multi-personal.

Of all the great-making properties, only omnibenevolence requires multiple persons. Omniscience, omnipotence, moral perfection, eternity, necessity, and any other conceivable great-making property can be secured by single divine person. Only omnibenevolence requires more than one person to be actualized.

Consider: 11. Therefore, God/GCB is a tri-personal being.

1-10 entail 11. 1-10 have been assessed on a general level, and seem true. Specific arguments against premises of this argument will be assessed below.

Section IV—Contra Tuggy: The Impossibility of a Singularly Personal Perfect Being

Dale Tuggy is no fan of the Trinity, regularly critiquing Trinitarian thought in his scholarly writings, during his conference lectures, and on his witty *trinities* online blog.¹²¹ Tuggy provides nearly a direct critique of this argument. Aside from some terminological differences, his objections to the category of *a priori* arguments for the Trinity are applicable to this argument and require consideration. Tuggy argues that a singularly personal being can be perfect/the GCB and therefore *a priori* Trinitarian arguments fail. Tuggy notes:

Most trinitarians believe that God is a Trinity based on the Bible and/or the testimony of the mainstream Christian theological tradition—[as expressed in the creeds]. But a few philosophers have argued that another sort of evidence is available, offering arguments from reason alone. There is a twofold motivation here. First, most Christians would like it to be the case that there's support for

¹²¹ For articles representing his views, see Tuggy's "Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism," *Religious Studies* 40, 2004, 269-87; "Constitution Trinitarianism: An Appraisal," *Philosophy and Theology* 25:1, 2013, 129-62; "On Counting Gods," *TheoLogica*, 2016; "Metaphysics and Logic of the Trinity," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2016. For lectures given see "On Counting Gods," Boston College, Boston, MA, December 2016. "How to be a Monotheistic Trinitarian," at the L.A. Theology Conference, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, January 2014; "The Failure of Fashionable Antiunitarian Arguments: Would a God who is a single Person fail to be perfect?" at EPS meeting on March 2, 2018, Huston, TX. See Tuggy's website <http://trinities.org/blog/> to really appreciate his often humorous and highly critical approach.

what their tradition says about God from another, independent quarter, from philosophy. Secondly, mainstream Christians would like to show how their doctrine of God is superior to that of other religious theists, such as Jews, Muslims, and unitarian Christians. These sorts of argument were never thought of in biblical or patristic times; they are the offspring of Anselmian perfect being speculation. I shall argue that we know of no such cogent argument.¹²²

It is important to understand these motivations. Consider the first motivation Tuggy notes: most Christians would like it to be the case that there is support from what their tradition says about God from the independent quarter of philosophy. This is certainly so, but the motivation is more than merely the desire to marshal supporting evidence for one's tradition. The motivation seems to be much stronger than that. If it is the case that God is tri-personal, as the tradition claims, then it stands to reason that God is necessarily tri-personal. If God is necessarily some way that could not be known prior to scriptural and creedal revelation, then this information presents a case of a necessary *a posteriori* truth.

Regarding metaphysically necessary truths, Saul Kripke¹²³ contends that some metaphysically necessary truths can be known *a priori*, such as "All bachelors are unmarried," or "Everything blue is colored," but that other metaphysically necessary truths can only be known *a posteriori*, such as "Water is H₂O," or "Hesperus is Phosphorus." The *a posteriori* truths cannot be known prior to experience. The *a priori* truths can be known by reason alone, prior to experience.

If it is the case that it is reasonable to hold that being tri-personal is essential to God, but this fact is known only through divine revelation and the interpretation of it, then it is the case that "The number of persons in the Godhead is three" is an example of a metaphysically

¹²² Dale Tuggy. "On the Possibility of a Single Perfect Person," in *Christian Philosophy of Religion*, C. Ruloff (ed.), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. 2013. P. 130.

¹²³ Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

necessary *a posteriori* truth. Many Trinitarians would be pleased to have philosophical support of the contention that God must be tri-personal and therefore advance *a priori* arguments for the trinity of God *based on*, and not independent of, what the scriptural and creedal experience affords them.

On the other hand, rather than seeking to demonstrate the necessity of what can only be known through revelation and the creeds, some seek to provide a philosophical notion of God generally. A philosophically *a priori* concept of God emerges from the consideration of great-making properties and the nature of a greatest conceivable being. Then it can be determined if any religious tradition lines up with that independently derived concept of God.

Most Trinitarians opt for the former approach, seeing *a priori* arguments for the Trinity as merely supportive of the metaphysically necessary truth declared in the tradition.¹²⁴ Yet some thinkers are Trinitarians *because of a priori* considerations.¹²⁵ Even if few endorse Trinitarianism because of such arguments, the motivation for *a priori* Trinitarian arguments is not exclusively the purview of the former approach.

¹²⁴ William Lane Craig is representative of the view. He says, “I’ve not seen any argument that would give us *a priori* knowledge that the number of persons in the Godhead is three. But given divine revelation, we know that there are three persons in the Godhead, and it seems reasonable to think that this is essential to God. It seems bizarre to think that in some possible worlds one of the persons of the Trinity goes missing! In this case it is a metaphysically necessary *a posteriori* truth that ‘The number of persons in the Godhead is three.’ So God has necessarily the property of being tri-personal, though this fact is known to us only via divine revelation.” (Reasonable Faith website <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/question-answer/P200/does-god-have-both-necessary-and-contingent-properties/#554> Does God Have both Necessary and Contingent Properties? November 25, 2017.)

¹²⁵ This is a rare occurrence since most people do not ponder the nature of God independent of the religious tradition they adopt. If one refrains from adopting any particular religious tradition, however, opting instead to consider the merits of various traditions, one might be compelled to consider the nature of God independent of the traditional construals of God. Pondering about God’s nature apart from religious tradition is, in fact, what led me to test out Christian Theism as it was the only tradition that lined up with God being triune, which seemed to me necessary given the nature of love.

Consider the second motivation listed by Tuggy: the desire to show that the tri-personal concept of God is superior to a singularly personal concept of God. When this motivation is channeled through *a priori* arguments for the Trinity, thinkers can evaluate if the concept of God presented by each of these traditions aligns with the notion of the GCB. It is a simple process: Only traditional Christianity claims that God is tri-personal. If it is shown that a tri-personal concept of God is required of the GCB, then the traditional Christian position is philosophically superior. If it is shown that a multiply-personal concept of God (but not necessarily a *tri*-personal one) is required of the GCB, then the traditional Christian position is philosophically superior to its singularly personal rivals, and the Trinitarian Christian may then downshift to *a posteriori* arguments to compete against other traditions that conceive of God as being multiply-personal. If it is not able to be shown that a multiply-personal concept of God is required of the GCB, then philosophy takes a neutral stand on the singularly/multiply-personal nature of God, and the various religious traditions will have to shift from *a priori* argumentation to *a posteriori* argumentation when comparing views. If it is shown that, in fact, a singularly personal concept of God is required of the GCB, then philosophy stands against multiply-personal concepts of God, including the traditional Christian tri-personal concept.

Tuggy correctly notes that the motivation is not merely to show how the traditional Christian concept of God is superior to singularly personal conceptions of God, but to do so in a specifically *a priori* fashion. The fact that more Trinitarians have not made this move is surprising, given the possible advantages and the very low risk to the endeavor. Either *a priori* Trinitarian arguments will demonstrate (1) that God must be *tri*-personal, (2) that God must be multiply-personal. (3) that *a priori* arguments must give way to *a posteriori* arguments

concerning the singularly/multiply-personal nature of God, or (4) that philosophy stands against multiply-personal concepts of God.

Tuggy seems to think only outcomes (2) and (3) are on the table and he endorses (3).¹²⁶

The *a priori* argument presented here specifically attempts to demonstrate how the multiplicity of the persons, in fact, does stop at three (1). Tuggy takes as a given, it seems, that philosophy does not stand against multiply-personal concepts of God (4), only that a perfect singularly personal being is possible.

Tuggy notes:

The core idea of these philosophical trinitarians is that it is impossible for there to be a solitary divine person. Hence, if there is at least one divine person, there must be at least two. Thus, we're two thirds of the way to a Trinity of divine persons. It is not clear how one can as it were stop the process of multiplication, so as to show that there are at most three. I lay this issue aside, as I shall argue that the project never gets off the ground. No one has shown that there can't be a solitary divine person, and whoever thinks theism to be possible, should also think it is possible for there to be only one divine person.

The method of Anselmian theology is to assume that a divine being is an absolutely perfect being. We then reason about how an absolutely perfect being must or could not be. But what exactly about absolute perfection rules out there being a single divine person?¹²⁷

Tuggy joins Perfect Being Theology in assuming that perfection can be conceived and analyzed. With this assumption in place, the perfect being is the same as the greatest conceivable being (GCB). Perfection is the peak maxima of greatness. A perfect being cannot be greater than it is. If a being is up for consideration as perfect, the test is conceivability. Does

¹²⁶ As evidence by Tuggy's voluminous writings on Christian Scripture and the Trinity. See especially Tuggy, Dale, "Trinity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/trinity/>. and "On the Possibility of a Single Perfect Person," in *Christian Philosophy of Religion*, C. Ruloff (ed.), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. 2013.

¹²⁷ Tuggy, 133.

that being possess the best combination of great-making properties essentially? The *a priori* argument under consideration contends that the conceivable great-making property a single divine person cannot maximize is love. A single divine person cannot be perfect exactly because it is possible to conceive of a being greater than a single divine person, because it is greater to possess maximal love essentially than merely to potentially possess maximal love. A being who possesses maximal love essentially requires nothing external of itself to possess the great-making property of love/benevolence maximally, but a being who only potentially possesses maximal love requires something external of itself to possess this great-making property maximally.

It is a diminution of greatness to need external circumstances to obtain (even if the being who needs those circumstances can bring them about) in order to maximally possess a great-making property. The being who possesses that same great-making property, but does so maximally and essentially, is greater in terms of that property. If that property is required for GCB status, then the possession of a limited form of that property precludes that being from consideration as perfect/the GCB if another conceivable being possesses that property maximally and essentially. According to the argument being considered, a singularly personal being does not possess maximal love essentially, but must first create something else in order to possess the great-making property love/benevolence maximally. Recall that the argument under consideration:

1. God is the Greatest Conceivable Being (GCB).
2. Any great-making property God/GCB possesses must be possessed to a maximal degree essentially.
3. Love/benevolence is a great-making property God/GCB possesses.
4. Maximal love/benevolence includes self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared (cooperative love of a third).
5. A singularly personal being cannot possess love-given, love-received, or love-shared essentially.
6. A dually personal being cannot possess love-shared essentially.
7. Therefore, God/GCB must be at least a tri-personal being.

8. Simplicity is a great-making property.
9. Being tri-personal is the simplest way to possess maximal love/benevolence.
10. No other great-making property requires the GCB be multi-personal.
11. Therefore, God/GCB is a tri-personal being.

Rather than addressing the structure of every particular *a priori* argument for the Trinity, Tuggy lumps all such *a priori* arguments together and presents a very specific demand of them all. At the heart of Tuggy's critique is that *a priori* Trinitarian arguments need to demonstrate the logical impossibility of a scenario he presents by "showing how it is *contradictory* to suppose it true."¹²⁸ Only then, he contends, is the multiply-personal nature of God secured by *a priori* considerations. Consider Tuggy's LONE GOD SCENARIO:

A perfect, divine person exists but doesn't create (or otherwise generate or give existence to) anything else. He's just there, timelessly beholding and loving himself, but not anyone else. He's a perfectly loving being—just as much as he would be were he to whip up some creatures, so as to have an object of love beyond himself. He's all-knowing, and so can perfectly imagine what it's like to love another. But he doesn't experience any such relationship, as only he exists. This god is perfect, yet perfectly alone.¹²⁹

Tuggy's scenario can be broken down in the following claims:

- LG1: A solitary divine person doesn't create (or give existence to) anything else.
- LG2: This divine person timelessly loves himself (but not anyone else).
- LG3: This divine person is perfectly loving.
- LG4: Having an object of love beyond himself does not enhance his 'perfectly loving' status.
- LG5: This divine person is all-knowing, which includes having perfect imagination.
- LG6: This divine person can perfectly imagine what it's like to experience 'other-love'.
- LG7: This divine person doesn't experience other-love relationships, as only he exists.
- LG8: This divine person is perfect.

Tuggy's scenario seems possible on a *prima facie* level, but faces modal and conceptual difficulties after proper consideration is given to the nature of perfection and love. Much will turn on what 'perfectly loving' means and if it is different from 'possessing maximal love.' The

¹²⁸ Dale Tuggy. "On the Possibility of a Single Perfect Person," in *Christian Philosophy of Religion*, C. Ruloff (ed.), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. 2013. P. 135.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

idea that perfectly imagining ‘what it’s like’ to be in other-love relationships is just as great as actually being in such relationships seems suspect. Is one really not greater than the other? A being that actually experiences other-love relationships in his essence and not as a result of external circumstances seems better than one who merely imagines such relationships. These claims will be evaluated, but not until Tuggy explains more of his case. Tuggy wonders:

What reason have we been given to think the above scenario is impossible? The way one shows a claim to be logically impossible—that is, necessarily false—is by showing how it is *contradictory* to suppose it true. Well then, where is the contradiction? I don’t see one. Furthermore, the above scenario positively seems possible. This doesn’t *prove* it to be possible (the only way to do that, would be for us be sure that it is actual, and of course, it is not actual, since there *are* created selves), but it does give us reason to think that it is possible. In light of this, social trinitarians cannot just assert that perfect goodness requires being in a peer-love relationship.

We’re told that a completely perfect being must be “perfectly loving”. I agree. But what is it to be “perfectly loving”? Perfection is a matter of a thing’s intrinsic condition, and so the perfection of being perfectly loving is a certain state of character, being disposed to think, feel, and act in loving ways. In principle, it seems that one can be perfectly loving without actually loving perfectly, or without ever actually loving anyone else in any way... surely, one can have the character trait of being fully loving without actually loving anyone beyond oneself. From the fact that a being is loving, it doesn’t logically follow that she actually loves, and it doesn’t matter if we change this to completely or perfectly loving.

There are plausible claims nearby. If a perfect being were not in any interpersonal relationship, he would be motivated to get into (at least) one, for the simple reason that other-love is more valuable than, or at least valuable in a different way than self-love. And so, a perfect being must have a motive to actually love another, and even to engage in love which goes beyond condescending loves, a love between what are in *some* sense peers. But no one has given us a reason to think that this motive must be acted upon by a perfect being. Swinburne simply asserts that this reason is “overriding” (such that one would be irrational and/or immoral to not act on it), and Davis asserts that a being who acted on it would be imperfect. But their strong modal claim needs more than a bare assertion to back it up; one proves a necessary truth by showing that it is contradictory to suppose the claim in question to be false. The burden remains on them, for the Lone God Scenario positively *seems* possible.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Ibid, 135-136.

Tuggy asks, “What reason have we been given to think the above scenario is impossible?” The reason is that the claims in the LONE GOD SCENARIO form an inconsistent set. The impossibility involves Tuggy’s final claim (LG8: This divine person is perfect). The conditions that Tuggy lays out in LG1-LG7 are insufficient to render this divine person perfect because they are incompatible with perfection. Tuggy voluntarily wades into the waters of Anselmian Perfect Being Theology which defines the perfect being as the greatest conceivable being. For those in this tradition, the perfect being is *than which no greater can be conceived*, but the divine person in Tuggy’s scenario is not the greatest conceivable being. Recall that Tuggy himself notes that “other-love is more valuable than, or at least valuable in a different way than self-love”¹³¹ and that a divine person “would be motivated to get into”¹³² other-love relationships. Tuggy even gives this strong modal claim: “A perfect being must have a motive to actually love another,” and then also claims “but no one has given us a reason to think that this motive must be acted upon by a perfect being.”¹³³

The type of other-love that Tuggy has in mind is a peer-love as opposed to ‘condescending loves’. If a divine person has motivation to engage in peer-love because it is ‘more valuable’ than self-love (LG2), but does not create or give existence to anything else (LG1) and does not experience such love (LG7), then this person is not the perfect being because a greater being is conceivable. A divine person who eternally and will-independently begets a second person is able to engage in peer-love essentially and not merely (even if perfectly) imagine what it would be like to experience other-love (LG6). The divine person in Tuggy’s scenario is not in other/peer-love relationships essentially, but must decide to act upon the

¹³¹ Ibid, 136.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

motivation to engage in such relationships. A possible being who will-independently exists as multiply personal is conceivable and would experience other/peer-love essentially. Of course, this multiply personal being would still be motivated to create other beings with whom to engage in other-love relationships, but this multiply personal being does not have to act upon that motivation to be the perfect being since the persons comprising that being already experience such relationships essentially.

A solitary person cannot be perfect if a greater being is conceivable and possible. In this case, a singularly personal being who loves himself (LG2), is all-knowing (LG5), can perfectly imagine what it's like to experience other/peer-love (LG6), is motivated to engage in other/peer-love, but doesn't experience other/peer love as only he exists (LG7) because he doesn't create or give existence to anything else (LG1) is not as great as a multiply personal being whose persons each love themselves, are all-knowing, are motivated to engage in other/peer-love, and actually engage in other/peer-love essentially.

The difference between these beings is the number of persons inherent to each being and the exemplification of the aspects of love. The first is will-independently singularly personal and remains so by choice, whereas the second is multiply personal by will-independent generation of (at least) a second person. The first is motivated to engage in other/peer-love, but does not engage in this valuable good, whereas the second has engaged in the valuable good of other/peer-love eternally and essentially (in virtue of the will-independent generation of (at least) a second person). The second being is greater because that being exemplifies a greater degree of the great-making property/good *love* and does so essentially. The first being is not as great as he exemplifies less than the greatest degree of love possibly exemplified essentially.

Tuggy's scenario is impossible because of LG8. The solitary divine person in his scenario cannot be perfect if a perfect being is the greatest conceivable being and if a being greater than the one in his scenario is conceivable. The entire project of Anselmian Perfect Being Theology is predicated upon the definition of the perfect being as the GCB. Maximal possession essentially of the great-making property/good *love* is greater than potential possession of it (even if the potential possession of it is perfectly imagined). A being who maximally possesses love essentially is conceivable. Under this understanding, Tuggy's scenario is logically impossible—that is, necessarily false as it is contradictory to suppose it true.

Tuggy asks, "Well then, where is the contradiction? I don't see one."¹³⁴ The contradiction is in calling the solitary divine person in his scenario perfect. It is not contradictory to suppose that such a solitary divine person exist and exist all alone, loving himself and no one else, yet perfectly imagining what it would be like to love others, be loved by others, or to share love with others. What is contradictory is to suppose that this solitary divine person is perfect. He is less than perfect since a greater being is conceivable—a being who eternally and will-independently exists as multiply personal and can maximally possess love essentially. But couldn't the solitary person still be perfect? No, not if a greater being is conceivable.

Perhaps a being is not made greater by maximally possessing (actually engaging in/exemplifying) love essentially? Tuggy pursues this line. LG3 claims that the solitary divine person in Tuggy's scenario is 'perfectly loving' and LG4 claims that having an object of love beyond one's self does not enhance one's 'perfectly loving' status. Recall that Tuggy understands being perfectly loving as a "certain state of character, as being disposed to think,

¹³⁴ Ibid, 135.

feel, and act in loving ways.”¹³⁵ Tying being perfectly loving to one’s dispositional character allows Tuggy to hold that “it seems that one can be perfectly loving without actually loving perfectly, or without ever actually loving anyone else in any way.”¹³⁶

Tuggy’s approach is a skillfully crafted one. His terminology shifts the onus from the exemplification of certain attributes to the disposition of the person’s character. Tuggy does not employ the oft used term of Perfect Being Theology ‘great-making properties,’ but rather refers to ‘goods.’ Tuggy claims that “not all goods, not even all great goods, are such that their absence would render one imperfect. Some goods one doesn’t need in order to be perfect.”¹³⁷ This seems right. The GCB does not need all goods.¹³⁸ Love, however, is a great-making property/good that the GCB must have, for its absence is a diminution of essential greatness and thus any being lacking it cannot be the GCB if its possession is conceivable.

But what is necessary for having the great-making property/good *love*? Is the disposition to think, feel, and act in loving ways enough? No. Tuggy’s scenario indicates that a person must actually love (at least) himself *and* be disposed to think, feel, and act in loving ways in order to be considered perfectly loving. This seems right, for God’s essential attribution is not exclusively occurrent or exclusively dispositional. Rather, God’s essential attributes are both occurrent and dispositional. Consider power. God is all-powerful/omnipotent, which is understood as either possessing *all-P* simpliciter, or as possessing *as much P* is compossible with God’s other essential attributes. This means that God actually does certain things without need of external circumstances obtaining *and* that God is disposed to act in certain additional ways not

¹³⁵ Ibid, 136.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 135.

¹³⁸ See discussion concerning God as Redeemer above.

yet available to him essentially as no external circumstances obtain, ushering in the need or opportunity to so act.

Consider knowledge. God is all-knowing/omniscient, which is understood in various ways. God certainly actually knows himself and all other necessary truths (natural knowledge) essentially. God knows truths that are dependent on God's acts and choices (free knowledge). It may be that God knows truths of counterfactuals, or what would happen, including the free choices of creatures, given certain circumstances obtaining (middle knowledge). Some, like Tuggy, deny middle knowledge and hold that God cannot know future truths based on the free choices of creatures and endorses open knowledge. Whether God actually knows the free choices of creatures essentially, God knows some things essentially *and* is disposed to know additional things (perhaps) not yet available to him essentially as no external circumstances obtain, ushering in the need or opportunity to so know.

In the cases of both power and knowledge, the perfect being must be able to do and know certain things essentially and must also be disposed to do and know other additional things beyond the scope of that being's essential existence. Yet, it is not good enough to be able to do and know certain, but not all, things available to be done and known essentially. If a being is able to do and know *most* things essentially, but not *all* things that can be done and known essentially, then that being is not as great as a different being who *can* do and know all things that can be done and known essentially.

So it is with love. God is all-loving/omnibenevolent, understood as possessing all the aspects of love available essentially along with the disposition to think, feel, and act in loving ways. Is the self-love of a solitary divine person combined with the disposition to think, feel, and act lovingly in additional ways not available to him essentially as no external circumstances

obtain, ushering in the need or opportunity to so think, feel, and act enough to secure omnibenevolence? That all depends on what aspects of love are available essentially. Self-love is certainly available essentially. But what about other-love (love-given, love-received, and love-shared)? Is it possible and conceivable for a person to actually love another person, be loved by another person, and share love for a third with another person essentially? Yes, as demonstrated earlier in this project. The persons inherent to a multiply personal being can conceivably experience other-love essentially—fully apart from anything external of that being and so can possess maximal love essentially.

This is where terminological differences between Tuggy and those used in the argument under consideration come into play. Possessing love maximally essentially does not happen if a being only actually loves in some, but not all, of the ways available essentially, even if that being is disposed to love in those other ways should the circumstances needed for them to be exercised ever obtain. However, a being can be perfectly loving if that being actually loves in all of the ways available essentially as long as he is also disposed to love in those other ways should the circumstances needed for them to be exercised ever obtain. This difference is crucial. For Tuggy, any occurrent love essentially (self-love), when paired with the disposition to think, feel, and act lovingly, is enough for a being to be ‘perfectly loving.’ This is because being perfectly loving is a ‘character trait’ that such a being does not need to exercise in order to have.

The reason that Tuggy’s scenario is not possible is because it is conceivable for a being to exemplify *all* the qualitatively unique aspects of love essentially. It is possible and conceivable for there to be a will-independently multiply personal being who experiences all four qualitatively unique aspects of love essentially and is disposed to think, feel, and act in loving ways not yet available as no external circumstances obtain. Experiencing/exemplifying all

qualitatively unique aspects of love essentially is greater than experiencing/exemplifying only one aspect of love essentially. A singularly personal divine being is not as great as a multiply personal divine being in terms of love. Therefore, a singularly personal divine being is not the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, a singularly personal divine being is not perfect.

Therefore, the LONE GOD SCENARIO is contradictory because it claims that a singularly personal divine being *is* perfect. Still Tuggy claims:

If a perfect being were not in any interpersonal relationship, he would be motivated to get into (at least) one, for the simple reason that other-love is more valuable than, or at least valuable in a different way than self-love. And so, a perfect being must have a motive to actually love another, and even to engage in love which goes beyond condescending loves, a love between what are in *some* sense peers. But no one has given us a reason to think that this motive must be acted upon by a perfect being.¹³⁹

Tuggy assumes a perfect being can be singularly personal, and also be motivated to engage in peer-love, but never actually engage in such a relationship. A being who is motivated to engage in a peer-love relationship and must choose to bring about the circumstances needed to engage in such a relationship is not as great as a being who can engage in peer-love essentially, apart from external circumstances. If the singularly personal being never chose to generate/create anything, his motivation to engage in peer-love would always go frustrated. If a will-independent multiply personal being never chose to generate/create anything, the motivation the persons feel to engage in peer-love could still be satisfied essentially since the divine persons that comprise this being can engage in those relationships essentially, apart from creating anything at all. Everything needed for these relationships to obtain is internal to the one being.

The reason a perfect being must engage in peer-love is that peer-love is a valuable qualitatively unique aspect of love, and love is a great-making property/good that must be

¹³⁹ Ibid, 136.

maximized in order to be the greatest conceivable being. A “perfect” being that cannot engage in peer-love essentially does not seem perfect at all since a being who can engage in peer-love essentially can be conceived, and it is greater to exemplify love maximally essentially than it is to exemplify it in a limited sense essentially. Yet Tuggy’s “perfect” being does not even need to bring about the circumstances to engage in peer-love to count as perfect by his reckoning. In what sense is such a (willfully) deficient being perfect at all?

Tuggy contends that his “perfect” being is perfect by virtue of (among other things) loving himself (LG2), being disposed to love maximally (LG3), having omniscience (LG5), and using that omniscience to perfectly imagine what it is like to engage in other-love relationships (LG6). Tuggy seems to be arguing that experiencing/exemplifying all the qualitatively unique aspects of love is no greater than exemplifying one of them so long as a being is disposed to exemplify them. Tuggy assumes that only self-love need be available to a perfect being essentially and that the other aspects of love are not needed essentially to be perfect. Such a singularly personal being can only experience the other aspects of love *after* willfully generating/creating someone with whom to engage other/peer-love. This assumption seems based on the notion that a perfect being is always a single person who chooses to generate at least one other person internal to his being or to create other persons external to his being. That assumption and notion seem incorrect, however, as evidenced by the conceivability and possibility of perfect being comprised of multiple persons, one of whom is the will-independent ontological source of the other(s).

If a perfect being comprised of multiple persons, one of whom is the will-independent ontological source of the other(s) is conceivable and possible, then all the qualitatively unique aspects of love are available to a perfect being essentially, not just self-love. This means that a

being who cannot experience/exemplify all the qualitatively unique aspects of love essentially, but instead perfectly imagines peer-love relationships cannot be just as great as a being who can and actually does exemplify peer-love essentially. After all, Tuggy says that a perfect being is “motivated to get into (at least) one [other/peer-love relationship], for the simple reason that other-love is more valuable than, or at least valuable in a different way than self-love. And so, a perfect being must have a motive to actually love another, and even to engage in [such] love.”¹⁴⁰ A possible being comprised of multiple persons, one of whom is the will-independent ontological source of the other(s), can exemplify all of the aspects of love essentially, whereas the being in Tuggy’s Lone God Scenario cannot.

This forces Tuggy to argue that other/peer-love is a good that God does not need in order to be perfect since being perfectly loving requires only being disposed to love others along with omniscience. The solitary divine person can perfectly imagine what it’s like to experience other love, and that is enough to secure his status as perfect. But this is only so if other/peer-love is not available essentially for a divine being—if other/peer-love is only available after the divine being decides to act on the motivation to engage in such a relationship and ‘whips up’¹⁴¹ another person to love.

Tuggy pulls *possession of maximal X* apart from being *perfectly X* and holds that a being who is *perfectly X* is good enough to be perfect. The reasoning seems inviting at first blush. Perhaps a perfect divine person does not need to possess maximal knowledge to be ‘perfectly knowing.’ His perfectly knowing status is secured by knowing what can be known essentially and by being disposed to know other things once they become available (after he creates).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 135.

Perhaps a perfect divine person does not need to possess maximal power to be ‘perfectly powerful.’ His perfectly powerful status is secured by his doing what can be done essentially and by being disposed to do other things once they become available (after he creates). In the same way, one drawn to this line of reasoning might contend that a perfect divine person does not need to possess maximal love to be ‘perfectly loving.’ His perfectly loving status is secured by loving himself and by being disposed to love in other ways once they become available (after he creates).

The reasoning pattern, however, concerning knowledge and power is different from the reasoning pattern concerning love. In the former cases, perfectly knowing and perfectly powerful status require (1) knowing or doing what can be known or done essentially and (2) the disposition to know and do other things once they become available (after the divine person creates). According to Tuggy, in the case of love, however, perfectly loving status does not require loving in all ways possible essentially and by the disposition to love other things once they become available (after the divine person creates). Instead, perfectly loving status can be secured by loving himself and by the disposition to love in other ways once they become available (after the divine person creates). But, as demonstrated above, self-love is not the only way to love available essentially to a perfect being. Other/peer-love *is* available for a divine being essentially since a possible being comprised of multiple persons, one of whom is the will-independent ontological source of the other(s), is conceivable.

Of course, a will-independent multiply personal being, if perfect, would also be omniscient and perfectly imagine what it’s like to engage in other-love with creatures, all while actually exemplifying/experiencing other love essentially internally. Tuggy, presumably, holds that both a singularly personal divine being and a will-independent multiply personal divine

being can be perfectly loving. Even if that is so, only the multiply personal being can possess maximal love essentially and the way in which the multiply personal divine being is perfectly loving is greater than the way the singularly personal divine being is. If it is greater to possess maximal love essentially and to be perfectly loving in a greater way, then a solitary divine person cannot be the perfect being since a greater being is conceivable.

Tuggy asserts that the “burden remains on [*a priori* Trinitarians], for the Lone God Scenario positively *seems* possible.” That burden seems to have been met. The possibility of the Lone God Scenario dissolves when perfection is properly defined. A solitary divine person cannot count as perfect if a greater being is conceivable and possibly exists. Consider the TRIUNE GOD SCENARIO

A perfect, will-independently tri-personal being exists but doesn't choose to create (or otherwise give existence to) anything else. This tri-personal being is just there, the persons of which timelessly behold and love themselves and each other. This being is perfectly loving in virtue of exemplifying all the qualitatively unique aspects of love essentially, not needing to whip up some external creatures to experience other-love. This being is all-knowing and so each omniscient person comprising the being can perfectly imagine what it's like to love another being even though no other beings exist. This God is perfect; the persons of which are never alone.

This scenario seems positively possible. Not only is it possible, but the God in it is greater than the solitary divine person in Tuggy's scenario because it is greater to possess love (and other great-making properties) to a maximal degree essentially, and multiple persons are necessary for any divine being to possess maximal love essentially. It seems, given the possibility and conceivability of a greater being than that of Tuggy's scenario, that a singularly personal being cannot be perfect.

Part III—A Successful Trinitarian Model

Section I—Trinity Monotheism Considered

The doctrine of the Trinity is committed to four essential affirmations:

Monotheism (ONE): There is one God.

Three Persons (THREE): The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

Father/Son/Holy Spirit Relationship (FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not).

Equality of the Persons: (EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

Each essential element of the doctrine is easily grasped when taken individually, but it can be an enigmatic process to apprehend the doctrine as a whole and explain how the doctrine works. Affirming the logical consistency of the above desideratum is not the same thing as offering a possible model which provides a way to think about how the essential truths coalesce into a coherent whole. Formulation of a defensible model of the Trinity must make use of strategies employed to uphold the logical consistency of the trinitarian data, and must also seek to provide a possible explanation of the innerworkings of the doctrine. Two broad categories of trinitarian models dominate the doctrinal landscape: Social Trinitarianism (ST), which places greater emphasis on the diversity of the three persons, and Latin Trinitarianism (LT), which places greater emphasis on the unity of one being.¹⁴² William Lane Craig notes that “The central commitment of [ST] is that in God there are three distinct centers of self-consciousness, each with its proper intellect and will.”¹⁴³ The central commitment of LT “is that there is only one God, whose unicity of intellect and will is not compromised by the diversity of persons.”¹⁴⁴ The

¹⁴² The appellation “Latin Trinitarianism” is somewhat misleading since Latin Church Fathers Tertullian, Hilary, and Athanasius were all Social Trinitarians, but dubbing one set of models as “Anti-Social Trinitarianism” seems to carry something of a negative connotation.

¹⁴³ Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. P. 582.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

potential danger of these emphases is polytheism for ST and Unitarianism for LT. Models located in either camp must clearly demonstrate how they avoid such dangers and uphold the trinitarian data.

The model to be advanced and considered here is in the ST camp. It takes as a base Craig's Trinity Monotheism model strengthens and it in two important ways: (1) by fully committing to mereological Composition as Identity and (2) by emphasizing the necessary will-independent generation of the Son and Spirit.

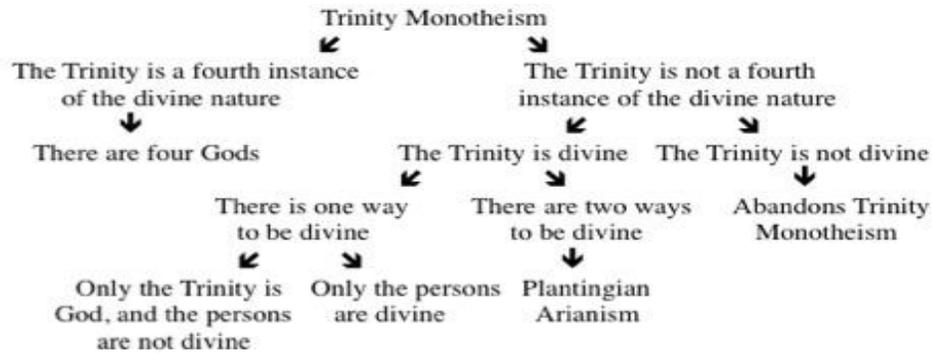
Craig describes his model as holding "that while the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole which is properly God. If this view is to be orthodox, it must hold that the Trinity alone is God and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while divine, are not Gods."¹⁴⁵

Craig begins an explanation of his model by responding to a challenge raised against ST by Brian Leftow:

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.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 588.

¹⁴⁶ Leftow, Brian. "Anti Social Trinitarianism," in *The Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins. Oxford University Press, 1999. P. 232.



Craig notes the Trinity Monotheist, concerning the first disjunction, “will clearly want to say that the Trinity is not a fourth instance of the divine nature, lest there be four divine persons.”¹⁴⁷ Concerning the next set of options, the Trinity Monotheist must affirm 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.” 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.” 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.¹⁴⁸

Craig explains the flaw in such a contention.

This inference would follow, however, only if there were but one way to be divine (namely, by exemplifying the divine nature); but [Trinity Monotheism] 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 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.

¹⁴⁷ Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 588.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 589.

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”).¹⁴⁹

If the trinitarian persons are not divine because they are instances of the divine nature, then how is it that they are divine? The persons are divine because they are parts of the Trinity. Craig likens this to the ways that something can be feline. “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.”¹⁵⁰ A cat’s skeleton and DNA are feline because they are parts of a cat. Being a part of a cat is not a “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.”¹⁵¹ A cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature and a cat’s skeleton is feline in virtue of being a part of a cat. Craig suggests:

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.¹⁵²

Is it the case, as Leftow suggests, that taking seriously the Trinity’s claim to be God somehow downgrades the divinity of the persons? Craig thinks not.

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

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 590.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid. Rather expounding on this part/whole relation, Craig favors avoiding making strong a mereological commitment, but it may be the case that a robust CAI theory can enhance this trinitarian model. Such a discussion will be presented in the following section.

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.¹⁵³

As noted above, a logically and creedally consistent position is that the Father, or the Son, or the Spirit taken individually does not exhaust the category "God" and hence none of the three persons taken individually is an instance of the divine nature, but each person is located fully within the category "God" and the three persons taken collectively exhaust the category "God" since they collectively form the Trinity which is identical to God. By being fully located in the category "God," each person taken individually is fully divine, but there are not three instances of a complete divine nature since being triune is a property of the divine nature and none of the persons taken individually possess that property.

Neither does it seem that understanding the Trinity to be God is an unorthodox position. In fact, such a commitment is at the heart of the orthodox creedal confession, "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity."¹⁵⁴ Taking seriously the claim that the Trinity is God seems to be precisely what the Athanasian Creed is concerned to accomplish in laying out the parameters of how to think about such a claim.

Craig is less concerned with squaring his model with the commitments enshrined in the creeds than he is with squaring his model with Scripture¹⁵⁵ but still notes:

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ The opening description of what consists in orthodox worship according to the Athanasian Creed.

¹⁵⁵ Craig notes that "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

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 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,”¹⁵⁶ 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.¹⁵⁷

Next Craig attempts to explain “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?”¹⁵⁸ He proceeds by means of an analogy. Craig considers Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog of Hades in Greek mythology. The image is easy enough to grasp: just imagine a giant dog body with three necks

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.” 591 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁶ There is an alternative reading of this claim, as noted above, such that each person taken individually is “God” and “Lord” means that each person is within the category “God” and “Lord,” but does not exhaust them.

¹⁵⁷ Craig, 590-91. As demonstrated above, statements like “The Father is God” do not need to be read as identity statements, but as statements of ascription.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 592.

and three heads, and thus three brains. Suppose that Cerberus, in virtue of having three brains, has three distinct states of consciousness and not one unified consciousness. Concerning the three heads of Cerberus, Craig playfully notes:

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."¹⁵⁹

It seems clear that, given this analogy, what makes the three-headed Cerberus one being is that he has a single body. But suppose that Hercules stabs the beast through the heart, killing Cerberus, yet his minds survived the death of his body. How would they still be one being and not three separate beings? Craig suggests that the three minds might all share the same soul and that this suggestion is how he ties such a mythological analogy back to the Trinity.

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

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

person. Such a model of Trinity Monotheism seems to give a clear sense to the classical formula “three persons in one substance.”¹⁶⁰

Trinity Monotheism seems to be a very strong trinitarian model. Firmly in the ST camp, Trinity Monotheism explains why there are not three Gods, preserves the divinity of the persons, and is consistent with the trinitarian data. While the model may possibly be strengthened, does it suffer in ways not considered by Leftow? Daniel Howard-Snyder certainly believes so.

The Athanasian Creed affirms: “the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God” and also “we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge every person by himself to be God...we are forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, there are three Gods.” Howard-Snyder notes that these words imply what he calls *The Sameness Claim*: the Father is the same God as the Son.¹⁶¹ The Athanasian Creed also affirms that “there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.” Howard-Snyder notes that these words imply what he calls *The Difference Claim*: the Father is not the same person as the Son.¹⁶²

Howard-Snyder contends that if the relation affirmed within the Sameness Claim is that of absolute identity (as opposed to relative identity), then the Sameness Claim is actually shorthand for the following conjunctions:

- (Si) the Father has property of being a God
- (Sii) the Son has the property of being a God
- (Siii/*The Person Identity Claim*) the Father is absolutely identical with the Son.

Howard-Snyder also contends that if the relation denied within the Difference Claim is absolute identity, then the Difference Claim is actually shorthand for the conjunctions:

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 592-93.

¹⁶¹ Howard-Snyder, Daniel. “Trinity Monotheism” in *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 5 No. 2. 2003. P. 375.

¹⁶² Ibid. The Sameness and Difference Claims can be derived from ONE and THREE.

- (Di) the Father has the property of being a person
- (Dii) the Son has the property of being a person
- (Diii) the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son.

Thus, given the supposition that both claims involve the absolute identity relation, “the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim cannot both be true; their conjunction entails a contradiction.”¹⁶³ Howard-Snyder wonders:

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 Claim is absolute identity. 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.¹⁶⁴

Supposing that the Sameness Claim (the Father is the same God as the Son) and Difference Claim (the Father is not the same person as the Son) are shorthand for the conjunctions Howard-Snyder provides is woefully mistaken. The mistake is twofold. First, it is mistaken to assume that the creed is employing the ‘is of identity’ when it states that “the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God,” as though each of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit taken individually is identical to God. It is better to assume that the creed is employing the ‘is of ascription,’ such that each person taken individually is inside the category “God.” Second, it is mistaken to assume that the creed does not make careful distinctions between *persons* and *God*. Howard-Snyder carries this supposition to his (Si) and (Sii) and it compels the wording of his (Siii/The Person Identity Claim): the Father is absolutely identical with the Son. Of course (Siii/The Person Identity Claim) contradicts (Diii), but the Sameness

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Peter van Inwagen opts for the first option and endorses a relative-identity view. 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).

Claim is only that the Father and the Son are the same God, not that they are identical, which is made explicitly clear by the Difference Claim.

It is not a mistake to assume that the creed employs an absolute identity relation in the Sameness Claim and in the Difference Claim, but it is a mistake to suppose that the use of absolute identity within these claims serves a shorthand for conjunctions that are obviously contradictory. To avoid the worry Howard-Snyder raises, and to avoid forcing relative identity into the claims, the Sameness Claim and the Difference Claim must be understood alternatively. Yet, Howard-Snyder thinks that Craig's reading is problematic. Rather than claiming that the Father is identical to a God and that the Son is identical to a God, Craig's understanding of the Sameness claim involves ascribing the property of being divine to the persons, resulting in the following conjunctions:

(CSi): The Father is divine

(CSii): The Son is divine

(CSiii/*The Property Identity Claim*): the property of divinity that the Father instantiates is absolutely identical to the property that the Son instantiates

The Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) share in common the same property in virtue of which each of them is divine. If each person exemplifies the same property of divinity, this understanding of sameness does not imply that the Father is absolutely identical with the Son since each is also a different person according to the Difference Claim. Howard-Snyder objects that a property-sameness understanding of the Sameness Claim as opposed to a person-sameness understanding arguably contradicts the trinitarian's monotheistic claim:

(ONE): there is one God.

Against Trinity Monotheism Howard-Snyder presents what he calls the Challenge of Polytheism.¹⁶⁵ It is summarized as follows:

- (1) the Difference Claim entails that the Father is not absolutely identical with the Son.
- (2) 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.
- (3) 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 . 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.
- (4) 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.

Is Trinity Monotheism actually polytheistic? No, it seems not. (3) seems false, and it begs the question against Composition as Identity.¹⁶⁶ It is not the case that 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, that x is a God and y is a God and that x is not the same God as y . According to Trinity Monotheism, the Father and the Son are not absolutely identical because each is a distinct person, but the Father has the property of being divine and the Son has the property of being divine. Having the property of being divine does not make the Father (taken individually) a God. Having the property of being divine does not make the Son (taken individually) a God. The reason for this is that one way of being divine is to instantiate the divine nature, which is what makes something a God, or, secondly, to be a part of the divine nature. A part of the divine nature is not a God, but is a part of God. According to Trinity Monotheism, a necessary property

¹⁶⁵ Howard-Snyder, 377.

¹⁶⁶ Howard-Snyder makes his position—that CAI is impossible—clear in a number of passages, all of which will be explored below.

of being God is being triune, and none of the persons taken individually possess that property. Only the Trinity as a whole—the persons taken collectively—has that property. Having the property of being divine makes the Father a part of God/the Trinity. Having the property of being divine makes the Son a part of God/the Trinity. According to Trinity Monotheism, x is a part of God and y is a part of God and x is not the same part of God as y . For any x and y if x is divine and y is divine, neither x nor y is “a God” unless either x or y exemplifies all the necessary attributes of God; that is, unless either x or y completely exhausts the category “God.” Otherwise, x and y , while divine, are not properly God since neither individually exemplifies all the essential properties of being God. The claim of Trinity Monotheism is that only the Trinity is properly God. The persons are each distinct centers of consciousness (thought, will, volition, etc.) that all share the property of being divine. None of the persons taken individually constitutes “a God” since none of them taken individually has the property of being triune, which is why there are not multiple Gods.

Howard-Snyder presses his critique, however, in a number of ways. He argues that the divinity of the persons is diminished if there is more than one way to be divine.

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 fully divinity of each of the Persons.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 379-80.

Unlike the way any of the properties that are constitutive of full divinity are “divine” or the sense in which a divine plan is “divine,” the persons are divine in a robust way precisely because each person is a person. That is, each person is a center of consciousness with a full set of rational powers. The confusion comes when thinking that parts are of lesser importance than wholes. After all, a cat skeleton, while fully feline, is not what people have in mind when thinking of felinity. A cat is fully feline and a cat skeleton is fully feline, but the cat skeleton is seemingly of less importance or worth than the full instantiation of a cat nature (a cat). Each person, however, is an eternal and necessary conscious set of rational powers (including omniscience, omnipotence, moral perfection) which is precisely what Christians have in mind when affirming the full divinity of each person, as enshrined in the creeds and affirmed today. So, while the Trinity is divine in virtue of being the sole instantiation of the divine nature, and the persons are each divine in virtue of being parts of (composing) the Trinity, there is no diminution of divinity for the persons since each person is a conscious set of rational powers that include omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection. The analogical nature of felinity is useful because it demonstrates that there is more than one way to be feline. Likewise, there is more than one way to be divine. Unlike a cat skeleton (which is not what most people have in mind when thinking of felinity), however, each person (taken individually) is robustly divine (what people have in mind when thinking that something is divine) since each person is fully equipped with a set of rational powers. This makes each person divine—each can rightly be ascribed “divine”—even though none of the persons (taken individually) can be God—none of the persons taken individually are identical to God. Only the persons taken collectively are identical to/compose God.

Howard-Snyder's most vociferous critiques involve just this composition aspect of Trinity Monotheism. He wonders "how exactly is it that the three Persons compose the Trinity 'as a whole'?"¹⁶⁸ This echoes Craig's question: "What is the salient difference between three divine persons who are each a being and three divine persons who are together one being?"¹⁶⁹ Craig answers that, as a mental substance, "God just seems to be a soul...the reason human souls are individual persons is because each soul is equipped with one set of rational faculties sufficient for being a person."¹⁷⁰ Trinity Monotheism understands God to be a soul which is equipped with three complete conscious sets of rational powers each of which is sufficient for personhood. This means that "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."¹⁷¹ God would not be three separate souls since the conscious sets of rational powers all belong to the same immaterial substance. Given this understanding, God would be one being/soul which supports three persons, similarly to how typical individual human beings each support one person.

Howard-Snyder contends that the persons must be individual substances since they "meet the conditions for being individual substances just as God does,"¹⁷² and wonders, "if the Persons are not individual substances, then to what category do they belong?"¹⁷³ The motivation for this contention and question is to place Trinity Monotheism at odds with the trinitarian formula *three persons in one substance*.¹⁷⁴ Howard-Snyder seems to think that if the persons are each

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 380.

¹⁶⁹ Craig, *Foundations*, 592.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 593.

¹⁷² Howard-Snyder, 395.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 393.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 395.

individual substances then they must each be individual beings, which would strengthen his polytheistic critique lodged earlier. If the Persons are individual substances and hence individual beings, then the Trinity would not be an individual, but a collection. Very careful distinctions are needed to resolve this matter. It may be the case that the persons are individual substances, but those individual substances would still be inseparable parts of the Trinity. It may be the case that the persons are not individual substances but still possess the properties necessary for robust divinity.

Craig points to Peter Simons' book *Parts*¹⁷⁵ for an analysis of composites to advance the debate. Simons notes that both individual things and collections can be composed of individuals. Simons notes that an individual is anything which can be the subject of a true singular (not disguisedly plural) count predication and that collections are objects which are essentially not one thing but many things. For instance, a wall is an individual that is composed of individual stones and a pack is a collection composed of individual wolves.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Simons, Peter. *Parts*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 232. Simons presents the chart:

“Possibilities of Composition.”

_____ can be composed/made of _____	Category	Example
individual	individuals	wall/stones
individual	mass	sweater/sm wool
individual	individuals + mass	toffee apple/an apple+sm toffee
individual	individuals + mass	fruitcake/currants+sm dough
mass	individuals	gold/gold atoms
mass	masses	dough/flour+water
mass	mass(es)+individuals	blood/plasma+blood cells
collection	individuals	pack/wolves
collection	mass	snowballs/sm snow
collection	individuals+mass	toffee apples/apples+sm toffee

Masses are concrete particulars which are neither one nor many individuals. When Simons uses “some” with a mass term, as in “some water” he writes “sm” to differentiate this usage from “some” in the sense of part, as in “some of the water.”

Trinity Monotheism holds that God is an individual substance composed of inseparable individuals. If this is so, then the persons are individuals which may or may not be substances themselves. Is God an individual or a collection? At first glance, the answer seems to depend on how God is being reckoned. Remember that orthodox trinitarian theorizing must adhere to both ONE (There is one God) and THREE (The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons). When counting by Gods, the Trinity/God is one. When counting by persons, the Trinity/God is three. This means that persons do not stand in a one-to-one correspondence with Gods or else there would be three Gods, which violates ONE. This, then, means that the persons somehow “fit” into the category *God*. Since God is one soul, or substance, the persons are not three souls or separable substances but are the three distinctive parts of the Trinity/God, and thus God is an individual composed of individuals. If any one of those individuals were not a part of the individual substance, or soul that God is, then God would not be the Trinity—each person is an inseparable part of the Trinity. The issue of whether or not the persons are individual substances remains. Are inseparable parts of a substance substances themselves? Craig notes that Simons’ example of the wall composed of stones is not illuminating because:

the stones were substances before being made into the wall, and the wall can be separated into stones which would then be the same substances. What about parts which were never separate substances, such as one’s hands? Are they substances? What about parts which cannot be separated from the whole without undergoing substantial change, such as the trunk of a tree? Are they substances? Such parts are individuals, but it is 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 having 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.¹⁷⁷

The persons of the Trinity seem not to be individual substances themselves, but inseparable parts of the one substance, or soul, that is the Trinity/God. They are inseparable parts because without any one of them, God would undergo substantial change. Must the individuals be substances in order to be divine in a robust sense? Can only substances be omniscient, omnipotent, etc.? Remember that persons are, under Trinity Monotheism, conscious sets of rational powers that, concerning God, stand in a three-to-one correspondence to souls/substances. It seems that each individual shares in the nature of being a divine person. A divine person is omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary. A divine person is not and cannot instantiate the full divine nature since the full divine nature includes the property of being triune and the property of being omnibenevolent/perfectly loving, both of which require three divine persons. No divine person taken individually can be perfect since no singular divine person can instantiate omnibenevolence. Only a (tri)unity of divine persons can be perfect.¹⁷⁸ The full divine nature can only be instantiated when three divine persons compose one divine being. Persons are not the sorts of things that can be tri-personal. Beings are the sorts of things that can be tri-personal.

What if this metaphysical understanding is mistaken and the individual persons *are* individual substances? Does this mean that God is not one substance? No. The sort of substance that the persons would be are not the same sort of substance that the Trinity/God is.

Craig explains:

¹⁷⁷ Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder." *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 101-13. P 112.

¹⁷⁸ As argued in Part II Section III above.

[S]uppose 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.¹⁷⁹

Even if the persons are each substances they would not each be beings, as they are inseparable parts and as such cannot each be a separate soul. This means that Trinity Monotheism can affirm that *God is three persons in one substance* regardless of whether or not the persons are individual substances.

Howard-Snyder notes that Trinity Monotheism's claim that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit taken individually are identical to particular persons, but not identical to individual substances mirrors the claim 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 [Craig's] view, the *false* proposition that God is a person."¹⁸⁰ Such a claim strikes Howard-Snyder as "most unusual."¹⁸¹ It strikes Howard-Snyder as obvious that God is a person and that if God is not a person then:

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.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More", 112-13.

¹⁸⁰ Howard-Snyder, 383.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 399.

Howard-Snyder mentions three. The first involves creation. The opening line of the Bible is “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Creation is an intentional act, but Howard-Snyder believes that intentional acts can only be performed by a person. If God is not a person, then “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.”¹⁸³ Could someone just say that God created the heavens and the earth insofar as the Son created them? Howard-Snyder thinks not, noting that borrowing of properties has limits and that 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.”¹⁸⁴

The second involves the *imago Dei*, the doctrine which states that human beings are made in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created human kind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.” The tradition has it that a human being is made in the image of God insofar as he or she is equipped with the rational powers of intellect and volition which allow for self-reflective agency and self-determination. “Unfortunately, this is the description of a *person*, which [Trinity Monotheists] 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?”¹⁸⁵

Third involves the divine nature. According to Trinity Monotheism, the divine persons “do not exemplify the divine nature, only the Trinity ‘as a whole’ enjoys that privilege. Thus, on [this] 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.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 400.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Craig responds on behalf of Trinity Monotheism by noting that a soul's cognitive equipment is "explanatorily prior to the number of persons there are: the reason there are three persons in the Godhead is because God is endowed with three sets of rational faculties sufficient for personhood,"¹⁸⁷ just as Howard-Snyder is one person because his soul is equipped with a single set of rational faculties. "We could perhaps say that personhood supervenes on rational faculties and in that sense depends on what sort of soul is involved."¹⁸⁸ If this is so, then a soul *is* antecedently the sort of thing that can borrow properties. A soul is personal if that soul is endowed with conscious rational powers sufficient for personhood. Typical human souls are endowed with one set of rational powers sufficient for personhood. God is a soul endowed with three such sets of rational powers and is thus three persons. Since souls can be possessed of rational equipment (in God's case three sets of rational equipment), a soul *can* create even if that soul is not *a* person. Such a soul, of course, would be personal, even if not a single person. That soul would be tri-personal. If the Father is the person of the Godhead who created the heavens and the earth, then the Godhead created them. If each person is involved in creating the heavens and the earth, then God created the heavens and the earth. The issue of appropriate linguistics and attribution will be addressed fully in the final part of this project.

Concerning the *Imago Dei*, human beings are made in God's image, similarly, because human beings are endowed with rational powers sufficient for personhood, just as God is so endowed, but whereas humans have one such set of powers, God has three. Both human beings and God are personal beings.

¹⁸⁷ Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More," 113.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Concerning the divine nature, Howard-Snyder assumes that God cannot rightly exemplify the divine nature unless God is a person. Craig observes:

it seems to me that God can [exemplify the divine nature] if God is a soul possessing the rational faculties sufficient for personhood. If God were a soul endowed with a single set of rational faculties, then He could do all these things. By being a more richly endowed soul, is God thereby somehow incapacitated? How can augmenting God's cognitive faculties make God less knowing, less good, less powerful, less worthy of worship? On our view it belongs to the divine nature to be a personal being, and a soul so richly endowed with rational faculties is, if anything, more majestic and worthy of worship than a more meagerly endowed soul.¹⁸⁹

Craig's Trinity Monotheism seems able to preserve the majesty and agency of God because God, who is the Trinity, is one soul equipped with three sets of rational powers, each sufficient for personhood, and so God is tri-personal. The persons of the Godhead are each divine (omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary), but none taken individually is the instantiation of the divine nature, which is why there is only one God.

Section II—Important Additions That Strengthen Trinity Monotheism: Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism

Craig's Trinity Monotheism is a ST model that identifies God with the Trinity, that describes God as a soul equipped with three sets of rational powers, each sufficient for personhood, and that argues that there are two ways for something to be divine—stantiate the divine nature (which only the Trinity does) or be an inseparable and distinctive part of the Trinity (which only the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit do). The main lines of critique against Trinity Monotheism involve arguing that it is actually polytheistic, that the persons are less

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

divine than the Trinity as a whole, that God is not a person, and the composition aspect of Trinity Monotheism is illogical.

Even against very thoughtfully considered critiques, Trinity Monotheism seems to stand as a viable trinitarian model. Craig is able to successfully ward off the charges of polytheism, diminished divinity of the persons, and the alleged problem of God not being a person. The areas that Craig's defense could be strengthened involve the composition aspects of Trinity Monotheism and the dismissal of the eternal generation of Son and Holy Spirit. Given that these two conceptual additions move Trinity Monotheism beyond its original presentation, a new, modified model emerges.

Remember the essential claims of Trinity Monotheism:

- (1) God is the Trinity.
- (2) God is one substance/soul equipped with three conscious sets of rational powers.
- (3) Something is (robustly) divine if it is the instantiation of the divine nature, or if it is an inseparable and distinctive part of the divine nature.

These conjunctions stand in affirmation of the trinitarian formula that God is *one being in three persons*. It is Trinity that is properly identified as God. God does not just happen to be triune; rather, being triune is an essential property that God possesses, and therefore only the Trinity instantiates the divine nature. Thus, while divine, the persons taken individually are not instantiations of the divine nature but are inseparable and distinctive parts of the divine nature. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are each a conscious set of rational powers, including omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection, and are the divine parts of the Trinity, which is the sole instance of the divine nature.

Craig's Trinity Monotheism purposefully steers clear of making mereological commitments in describing how it is that the persons are parts of the Trinity. He contends,

“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.”¹⁹⁰ Craig’s model seems to assume Composition as Identity (CAI), but does not fully embrace or endorse it. What follows is an attempt to enhance Craig’s model by adding to it a full-fledged mereological Composition as Identity theory and a will-independent theory of eternal generation concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit. These additions produce a distinct trinitarian model: Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism. There are five essential claims of Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism:

- (1) God is the Trinity.
- (2) God is one substance/soul equipped with three conscious sets of rational powers.
- (3) Something is (robustly) divine if it is the instantiation of the divine nature, or if it is an inseparable and distinctive part of the divine nature.
- (4) The three persons of the Trinity compose God.
- (5) The generation of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son is will-independent.

The Three Persons of the Trinity Compose God

Traditional Christian theism holds that God is triune and that God does not just happen to be triune, but that triunity is an essential attribute of the divine nature. If it is the case that God is necessarily triune, then God just is the Trinity and God cannot have been other than the Trinity. In possible worlds vernacular, there is no possible world in which God is not triune. Although contentious within metaphysics, the Composition as Identity (CAI) thesis, which claims that the composition relation *is* the identity relation, seems to be a natural description of the relationship between the Trinity and God.

¹⁹⁰ Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, 590.

Composition as Identity is an important thesis to use in understanding the logical coherence of the doctrine of the Trinity, as described in Part I, Section II above.

Recall Bohn's definition of Composition as Identity as "the thesis that a whole and all its parts collectively is the same thing under two different modes of presentation."¹⁹¹ Given this understanding, God and the Trinity are the same portion of reality under two different modes of presentation. Wherever God is, the Trinity is. Wherever the Trinity is, God is, similarly to how wherever Superman is, Clark Kent is. This is so because Superman is Clark Kent and because God is the Trinity.

The Superman/Clark Kent identity example is easier to grasp as each predicate refers to a numerically consistent referent. The Trinity/God identity claim of Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism is made more difficult by the fact that the numerical referent is one-many as opposed to one-one. But this difficulty, as noted above, gives way if numerical properties are relational properties. A portion of reality's numerical property (cardinality) depends on how it is conceptualized. Recall that when conceptualizing some portion of reality as two arms, two legs, one head, and a torso, it has the numerical property "six" holding true of it, but when conceptualizing the same portion of reality as a body, it has the numerical property "one" holding true of it. It seems that independently of being conceptualized, a certain portion of reality has no particular numerical property holding true of it at all.

Consider God. When someone conceptualizes the portion of reality that is God as *God* that portion of reality is conceptualized as one in number. Yet when someone conceptualizes the portion of reality that God is as *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (the Trinity) that portion of reality is

¹⁹¹ Bohn, E. Unrestricted Composition as Identity" in *Composition as Identity*, eds. D. Baxter & A. Cotnoir, Oxford University Press. P. 143.

conceptualized as three in number, but it is the same portion of reality nonetheless. As Bohn notes:

Numerical properties aren't properties holding of it independently of how it is being conceptualized. This is of course not saying that one conceptualization cannot be better somehow than another, nor that they cannot be equally good. It is only saying that, better, worse, or equal, it is a conceptualization of one and the same portion of reality either way.¹⁹²

Thus it is the case that God is one in number *relative* to one way of conceptualizing that portion of reality that God is, and it is the case that God is not one in number *relative* to another way of conceptualizing the portion of reality that God is. This seems precisely to be what the trinitarian requirements ONE and THREE demand. Such an understanding can be described as follows using the logical form:

One(x,y) & not-One(x,z).

This is not a contradiction since 'x' ranges over portions of reality and 'y' and 'z' range over the concepts 'God' and 'Father, Son, Holy Spirit', respectively.

Yet Howard-Snyder critiques Craig's Trinity Monotheism, which does not explicitly endorse CAI, but only hints at it, contending that the claim that an individual substance can *be* three persons is false. Trinity Monotheism and Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism both claim that God is absolutely identical with the three persons. Howard-Snyder contends, "This claim is false since the relation of absolute identity is a one-one relation, not one-many."¹⁹³ He later adds, "[Trinity Monotheism claims] God, that single composite item, is absolutely identical with the three Persons, which is impossible."¹⁹⁴ Merely begging the question against CAI does not do away with the theory, however. If Howard-Snyder's insistence

¹⁹² Bohn, *Logic of the Trinity*. 366.

¹⁹³ Howard-Snyder, 384.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 398.

of impossibility lies not merely in the one-many mereological relation, but instead contends impossibility lurks since one immaterial substance cannot support/be made of three persons because the persons are themselves immaterial substances, his insistence still fails to undo the compositional aspect of this model. As noted in the evaluation of Craig's Trinity Monotheism, the persons are still persons even if they are each individual substances in their own right, but the sort of individual immaterial substances they would be are not the same sort of immaterial individual substance that is the soul who is God. They would be persons, not souls. It seems more likely, however, that the persons are not individual immaterial substances in their own right, but are sets of rational powers (persons) which are all inseparable and distinct parts of the substance/soul that God is. It seems that Howard-Snyder wants to advance both senses of impossibility.

CAI, as applied to trinitarian theorizing, holds that *God = the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit*. 'God' is a singular term, and 'the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit' is a plural term that each refer to the same portion of reality, just conceptualized differently. It is important to read '=' collectively, not distributively. That is to say, God is identical with neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit, but that God is identical with all of them taken together. *God = the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit collectively*.

Howard-Snyder, in holding that the identity relation must be one-one, rejects this. Yet recall Bohn's helpful example:

Consider three things *a*, *b*, and *c* surrounding one thing *x*. It is then true that *a,b,c* taken together or collectively surround *x*, but not true that *a* surrounds *x*, and it is not true that *b* surrounds *x*, and it is not true that *c* surrounds *x*. To solve the Trinitarian Paradox, we simply treat identity like that; hence, the collective reading of proposition.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Bohn, Logic of the Trinity. 367.

It is simply not the case that this model holds to an understanding of identity that requires *a* (or *b* or *c* taken individually) to surround *x* or that requires the Father (or the Son or Holy Spirit) to be identical to a particular God. Such a distributive understanding of composition stands in direct opposition to the collective understanding of CAI. CAI helps make sense of the idea that none of the persons taken individually are identical to a God, but that only the persons taken collectively (the Trinity) are identical to a God. The model also affirms that there is only one God who is composed by/identical to the Trinity.

As noted in Part I, Section III above, the three challenges to CAI—that numerically hybrid identity statements are ungrammatical in English, that no coherent truth conditions exist for numerically hybrid identity statements, and that CAI must deny Leibniz’s Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals—can each be answered. CAI makes important use of numerically hybrid identity statements, which *are* grammatical in colloquial English, Norwegian, Hungarian, and in formal logical languages. CAI can provide coherent truth-conditions for numerically hybrid identity statements, namely when the value, *v*, of *xx* is identical with the value of *y*. That is, ‘*xx=y*’ is satisfied iff *v(xx)* is identical with *v(y)*. CAI says that the truth-condition for ‘*xxCy*’ is satisfied iff *v(xx)* is identical with *v(y)*. CAI can also stand against charges of various sorts alleging inconsistency with Leibniz’s Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals, since the arguments making such allegations are either invalid based on equivocation or they contain a false premise based on a misunderstanding of conceptualization.

Assigning the mereological theory of Composition as Identity to the model allows for a more robust understanding of how it is that God just is the Trinity. The one God *is* the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) *are* the one God. The one God is composed of the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) compose the one

God. The three persons are distinct divine persons, but it is not the case that each person individually/distributively is identical with God.

The CAI tenet of Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism requires consistent application of the collectively/individually distinction so that statements like “the Father (or Son or Holy Spirit) is God” are to be read not as identity statements, but as statements of ascription. “The Father is God” ascribes the property of being divine to the Father, but since the Father individually is not the whole Godhead, the Father is not identical to God. The statement “the Trinity is God” is to be read as an identity statement since the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit collectively are identical to God.

Yet proponents of logical critiques of the Trinity regularly try to elicit contradiction by charging that the doctrine claims that the Father individually is identical to God, that the Son individually is identical to God, and that the Holy Spirit individually is identical to God. This insistence comes from a particular reading of the traditional creeds, which was disputed above. Since the creeds affirm that there is one God, statements that the Father (or Son or Holy Spirit) are God should be read as employing the ‘is of ascription.’

Recall that the pattern of the Athanasian Creed is to affirm:

The Father is X; the Son is X; and the Holy Spirit is X;
And yet there are not three Xs, but one X.

The creed follows this pattern six times in a row, supplying “uncreated,” “infinite,” “eternal,” “Almighty,” “God,” and “Lord” in place of X. The creed then immediately follows this repeated pattern with the following affirmation:

We acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
We are forbidden to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.

The only way to make sense of this pattern which ascribes X to each of the persons, but does not yield three Xs, is to read the first line as utilizing the “is of ascription” when predicating X of the persons, and *not* as employing the “is of identity,” and then to read the second line as using the (collective) “is/are of identity” when denying that there are three Xs. The denial that there are three Xs seems to be based on the understanding that the divine persons are each part of the one X. The only way to yield just one X is to prevent a reading whereby each person is identical to an X. This forces the first line to be an ascription of a particular attribute to each person.

The hang-up to embracing this seemingly obvious interpretation of the creed is the final couplet, the first line of which acknowledges each person himself to be God and Lord. If the creed stopped there and did not include the second line of the final couplet, the trinitarian would be forced to embrace either logical contradiction, relative identity, or inexplicable mystery when affirming the doctrine of the Trinity. Fortunately, the second line of the final couplet sheds light on the intent of the creed. Since it is forbidden to affirm that there are three Gods or Lords, the affirmation that each person himself is God and Lord must, as each of the previous six couplets are, be an affirmation that the property predicate “God” and “Lord” is ascribed of the persons, which is to say that each person is fully inside the predicate categories “God” and “Lord.”

To better understand the deployment of the terms “God” and “Lord” in the final couplet, the earlier affirmations that also use the terms should be considered. Consider:

The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.
And yet there are not three Gods, but one God.

It is quite simple to see that the creed intends an ‘is of ascription’ in the first lines when the X is “uncreated,” “infinite,” “eternal,” and “Almighty.” Some interpreters think the pattern breaks when the X is “God.” The reason for this is likely that “God” often functions like a

proper name for the one God. Must “God” always function as a proper name? Certainly not.

The term can serve as sortal, or count noun, and there is a predicative property usage of the term as well. It is not always immediately clear which usage is intended when the term is employed.

Consider the following uses:

- (1) Jesus is God.
- (2) The Trinity is God.
- (3) And yet they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are not three Gods; but one God.

Proper names are linked to identity,¹⁹⁶ but none of these examples require the term ‘God’ to function as a proper name. The key to determining the usage of the term ‘God’ does not lie in its deployment, but with the verb of the sentence in which it is deployed. Each of (1)-(3) include either an ‘is’ or an ‘are,’ which is the same verb conjugated for singular and for plural subjects.

Consider (1): Jesus is God.

Jesus (the Son) is a divine person according to the Christian faith as laid out in the creeds. ‘Jesus’ is the subject, ‘God’ is the object, and ‘is’ is the verb. How does the verb function? As noted above, ‘is’ can be read in an identity way or in a predicative way. Even if ‘God’ here served as a proper name, under the ‘is of identity’ reading, Jesus would be identical to God. Every property true of Jesus would be true of God, and every property that God has Jesus has. If either Jesus or God has a property that the other does not have, then Jesus is not identical to God. Jesus has the property of being a part of the Trinity, and thus is not triune, but God has the property of being triune, and is thus not a part of the Trinity. Jesus, then, is not identical to God, even if ‘God’ here is intended as a proper name since it is not the case that Jesus is everything

¹⁹⁶ See Kiripke (*Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.) and Lewis (“Index, Context and Content,” in *Papers in Philosophical Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21–44. 1998.).

that God is. Does such an understanding render (1) false, or is there another possible reading of it?

Under an 'is of predication' reading of (1), Jesus is not identical with God since he is not everything that God is (Jesus is not the Trinity), but Jesus is located fully within the category 'God,' and yet Jesus does not exhaust the category since the Father and the Holy Spirit are also located fully within the category 'God.' Similarly, 'Superman is super' does not mean that Superman is identical to 'super' since he is not everything that is super, though such a statement does affirm that Superman is fully inside the category 'super,' but Superman does not exhaust the category. 'Superman is super' is consistent with the statements 'Supergirl is super' and 'Superman is not Supergirl.' The reason these three statements are consistent is that the 'is' does not denote identity in the first two statements; it ascribes a property to both Superman and to Supergirl. The final statement's use of 'is' *does* denote identity, explicitly denying that Superman and Supergirl are identical.

The property that (1) ascribes to Jesus is something like *is a divine person*. Since the creed explicitly denies the logical outcome of having three Gods, the 'is' when affirming that 'The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God,' as it does in (1), must be serving as the 'is of predication.' The only difficulty that remains is that the final couplet does not say 'the Son (Jesus) is a divine person,' it says *the Son (Jesus) is God*. But since 'is a divine person' is a legitimate reading of 'is God,' under predicative property assignment, the fact that 'God' often plays the part of a proper name should not drive one's interpretation to the 'is of identity.'

Consider (2): The Trinity is God.

Here the 'is' must indicate identity. While all forms of Trinity Monotheism view this statement as an identity statement, no 'is of predication' reading makes sense for (2) since the

property predicated of something indicating that it is the Trinity is *triune*. The term ‘God’ can serve as a predication indicating that someone is a divine person, but since the Trinity is everything that God is—the Trinity fully exhausts the category ‘God.’ An ‘is of predication’ reading collapses into an employment of the ‘is of identity’ even if the predicative reading was intended since the Trinity fully exhausts the category ‘God.’

Consider (3): And yet they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are not three Gods; but one God.

Here the ‘to be’ verb is conjugated for a plural subject—they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit collectively). (3) is an example of a negation of a verb (*are not three Gods*) followed by an assumed usage of that verb (*but [are] one God*). The only legitimate reading of the *are not* verb in (3) is an ‘are of identity’ reading because the object *three Gods* cannot function as a predicative category since the category would be repeated in triplicate if the verb were not negated. Categories have no need of reduplication because things that are not identical to each other can coexist in a given category as long as none (distributively) exhaust that category. If something fully exhausts a given category, then anything in that category is identical to that something. Since (3) specifically notes that *they are not three Gods, but one God*, this is not a case of three non-identical things coexisting within the category ‘God.’ All this prevents an ‘are of predication’ reading. This is a case of ‘they’ collectively being one thing, and since the one thing they are fully exhausts the category (according to the creed), even if the authors had ‘God’ in mind as a property category able to be predicated of something, that category understanding becomes an identity relationship in virtue of the complete conceptual overlap of ‘they (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit)’ and ‘God.’

So the pattern of the creed is clear. In each instance of:

The Father is X; the Son is X; and the Holy Spirit is X;

And yet there are not three Xs, but one X

the first line always utilizes the ‘is of ascription,’ whereby a particular attribute is predicated of each of the persons, and the second line always utilizes the ‘is of identity,’ to deny the existence of three separable Xs and to affirm the existence of a solitary X. The implication of this pattern is that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit collectively compose/are identical to God. The pattern does not suddenly break when the creed affirms:

We acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
We are forbidden to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.

Again, the first line employs the ‘is of ascription.’ To say every person by himself is God, is not to say that each person by himself is identical to God, which is made clear by the second line which forbids the existence of three Gods. It is to say that each person by himself is fully inside the category ‘God.’ That is, each person is equipped with all the necessary properties to count as a divine person and does not require the other two persons to warrant membership inside the category ‘divine person.’

Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism understands the above to mean that each person by himself is omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary, but that none of the persons exists by himself since each is an inseparable yet distinct part of the one immaterial substance/soul that God is. In other words, God is one substance/soul that is composed of three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who collectively are the Trinity. The Trinity is properly God since the Trinity is identical to God. The persons are divine, and thus have the property ‘God’ predicated of them, but none of the persons taken individually exhausts the category ‘God.’ Only the Trinity exhausts that category, which is why the Trinity is God.

The Generation of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son is Will-Independent

Another important distinctive aspect of Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism is the full-fledged affirmation of the eternal generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Craig's Trinity Monotheism holds that the Trinity is God, and that God is one soul that is equipped with three sets of rational faculties each sufficient for personhood. His model makes no commitment concerning the mereological part-whole relationship between the divine persons who are distinctive parts of the Trinity, nor does his model seek to align with all four traditional trinitarian creedal parameters. Craig is concerned to align his model with Scripture alone and is willing to depart from certain creedal commitments. One area in which Craig departs from the creedal data concerns the generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Craig notes:

Finally, such a model does not feature (though it does not preclude) the derivation of one person from another, enshrined in the confession that the Son is "begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made" (Constantinopolitan Creed). God could simply exist eternally with His multiple cognitive faculties and capacities. This is, in my opinion, all for the better. For although creedally affirmed, the doctrine of the generation of the Son (and the procession of the Spirit) is a relic of Logos Christology which finds virtually no warrant in the biblical text and introduces a subordinationism into the Godhead which anyone who affirms the full deity of Christ ought to find very troubling.¹⁹⁷

It would be troubling indeed if subordinationism found its way into the Godhead since subordinationism is the heretical view that the Father is somehow greater in power or authority than the Son and the Holy Spirit. The creeds, however, are explicit that the three persons of the Trinity are equal while at the same time affirming that the Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Along with ONE and THREE are the following traditional creedal affirmations: (FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps

¹⁹⁷ Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations*, P. 591.

with the Son, perhaps not).

(EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism is a model of the Trinity that seeks to satisfy all four traditional creedal affirmations. Craig's Trinity Monotheism satisfies ONE, THREE, and EQUALITY, but is not concerned to address FATHERSOURCE. Is Craig's reticence to satisfy FATHERSOURCE warranted? Is the doctrine of the generation of the Son "a relic of Logos Christology which finds virtually no warrant in the biblical texts and introduces subordinationism into the Godhead"?¹⁹⁸ It seems that many biblical texts do affirm the generation of the Son. Craig holds that these texts (mostly found in the Gospels) refer to the economic Trinity (the Trinity during the Incarnation) and not the eminent Trinity (eternal Trinity). The doctrine is affirmed in the traditional creedal orthodoxy. Even if it is not explicitly scriptural, it is consistent with Scripture. But does the generation of the Son and Holy Spirit introduce subordinationism into the Trinity?

Consider FATHERSOURCE as enshrined in Nicene Creed and Athanasian Creeds. The Nicene Creed affirms:

- (a) The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.
 - The Son is:
 - (a.i) God from God
 - (a.ii) Light from Light
 - (a.iii) True God from True God
 - (a.iv) Begotten, not made
 - (a.v) One in being with the Father
- (b) The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father [and the Son].

The Athanasian Creed affirms:

- (c) The Father is neither made, nor created, nor begotten.
- (d) The Son is neither made, nor created; but begotten of the Father alone.
- (e) The Holy Spirit is neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeds from the Father [and the Son].

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Recall Lewis' description of begetting.

To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself... What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man.¹⁹⁹

Traditional orthodoxy affirms that the Father eternally begets the Son and thus the Son is eternally of the same kind as the Father, or one in being with the Father (a.v). One in being means that there is no "dividing the Essence," (a stricture of the Athanasian Creed). Since the begetting is eternal, there was never a time the Son did not exist, and the Son is of the same kind as the Father. Three issues must be considered regarding the generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit: eternity, necessity, and volition.

It seems that in order for FATHERSOURCE to reconcile with the creedal claim that "the Son is eternally begotten of the Father," the generation of the Son must be eternally atemporal or else some duration would pass while the first divine person decided to generate a second person. This generation must also be necessary or else there would be a possible world in which the Father did not generate the other persons, the implications of which include rendering the Trinity unnecessary and allowing God to be less than the Greatest Conceivable Being. The Father's generation of the other divine persons must also be free of his volition/will. The alternatives to will-independent generation are to claim, as Craig does, that God simply exists eternally with multiple rational faculties and capacities, or that the generation of the Son is a volitional choice. If a trinitarian model claims that God simply exists eternally with multiple rational faculties, then that model abandons FATHERSOURCE since the Father is not the source of the Son or the Holy Spirit. In addition to departing from traditional orthodoxy, such models also face the problem of

¹⁹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. Chapter 23.

explaining how the desires of three omnipotent persons would not be frustrated unless one person functioned as the source of the others.

Swinburne addresses this worry, asking, “Would not the omnipotence of one such individual be subject to frustration by the other individual and so not be omnipotence?”²⁰⁰ Since a divine person is morally good, no conflict between divine persons could emerge on the basis of disagreements concerning actions that are either morally required or morally impermissible since all divine persons will necessarily agree about such actions. What about actions that are not morally required, but are still morally good, like if one of the divine persons wanted to make a planet rotate clockwise but another divine person wanted that same planet to rotate counterclockwise?

They cannot both succeed. The only way in which conflict can be avoided is if each of the three persons sees themselves as having at any one time different spheres of activity. Then each could be omnipotent, but there would be no conflict because in virtue of their perfect goodness no divine person would try to do an act of a kind which would be incompatible with an act which another divine person was trying to do. Each would be omnipotent in that, for example, if he chooses to make Uranus rotate in a clockwise direction, he would succeed; but only one would choose to do so. The Father brings about, sustains, and eliminates things in one sphere of activity, the Son does this in another sphere, and the Spirit does this in a third sphere.

But what could determine which divine person had which sphere of activity? Persons caused to exist by another person have obligations to the person whom caused them. So the Father, being perfectly good, will seek to avoid any conflict by laying down for each divine person his sphere of activity; and the others, being perfectly good will recognize an obligation to conform to this rule. So there will be no possibility of conflict.

If divine persons other than the Father did not derive their existence from the Father, there would be no one with the authority to lay down the sphere of activity for each divine person.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* 30.

²⁰¹ Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* 30.

Swinburne sees the various spheres of activity laid out by the Father as the means by which “each would recognize a duty not to prevent or frustrate the acts of the other... 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.”²⁰²

Such an account provides a very coherent explanation of how the desires of three omnipotent divine persons can coexist without frustration. It does not seem that divine persons having obligations to the one who is their source diminishes the ontological greatness of those generated persons. They can still be equally eternal, powerful, knowing, good, etc. as the Father who is their source. But would the divine persons be equal with respect to necessity? Swinburne draws distinctions when it comes to necessity. The bottom line is that necessary things *inevitably must be*. Swinburne holds that something is ontologically necessary if nothing else caused it to exist.²⁰³ Swinburne notes:

I define a being as ‘Metaphysically necessary’ if either it is ontologically necessary or it is inevitably caused to exist by an ontologically necessary being. Their equal inevitable existence makes the members of the Trinity equally worthy of worship. All three members of the Trinity are metaphysically necessary persons, but the Father alone is ontologically necessary. And the whole Trinity is ontologically necessary because nothing else caused it to exist.²⁰⁴

So will-independent generation of the Son (and Holy Spirit) provides a means by which omnipotent persons can avoid conflict and allows all the divine persons to be necessary. Even though the Father is the ontological source of the Son and the Holy Spirit, a will-independent understanding of FATHERSOURCE squares nicely with EQUALITY. It may be possible that the Father eternally and necessarily generate the other divine persons according to his will, but

²⁰² Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 172-73.

²⁰³ Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* 31.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

that possibility seems to prevent the equality of the persons, as one person exists independent of any will, but two are dependent upon the will of the Father.

If a trinitarian model claims that the generation of the Son is a willed choice, then that model abandons EQUALITY even if that generation is eternal and necessary. Of course, if the willful generation of the Son is a choice, the Son would seem to be unnecessary and thus not as ontologically great as the first person. Those who advance volitional person-generation tend to promote unitarian rather than trinitarian models of divinity, since three persons are not necessary—a second (or third) person would only exist if the first chose to generate that person (or persons). This is Tuggy's tendency. In his critiques of various trinitarian models, Tuggy advances alternatives that reject the traditional trinitarian orthodoxy and offers up unitarian proposals. This is just what he does when evaluating *a priori* arguments for the Trinity.

Recall his Lone God Scenario which argues that a single divine person can be perfect. This single divine person could choose to generate another person, but would have no need to do so since, according to Tuggy, the single divine person is already perfect. This stands in opposition to the *a priori* argument advanced on behalf of trinitarianism in Part II, Section III and IV above. That argument contends that a single divine person is not perfect since he cannot exemplify maximal omnibenevolence. A single divine person can only exemplify one of the four qualitatively unique aspects of love and thus fails to fully exemplify the great-making property maximal love. According to reasoning like Tuggy's, since a single divine person, who could choose to generate another person, but does not have to can be lauded as perfect, there is no need even to bother with trinitarianism at all.

The problem with models of divinity which abandon either FATHERSOURCE or EQUALITY is that they cannot stand within traditional Christian orthodoxy. If appropriate

scriptural interpretation or logical coherence demands breaking with traditional orthodoxy, then the break is warranted, but if neither Scripture nor logic demand it, then models of divinity should adhere to the traditional trinitarian tenets if they wish to remain orthodox.

In order to adhere to the traditional orthodoxy, then, this model affirms the will-independent generation of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father (and the Son). Nothing in Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism hangs on whether the Holy Spirit is generated by the Father alone or by the Father and the Son. The biblical texts indicate that the Father and the Son generate the Holy Spirit, and this position is defended in Part I, Section IV.

Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism holds that God, who is and is composed by the Trinity, is the sole instance of the divine nature, but there are two ways to be (robustly) divine—to instantiate the divine nature, or to be an inseparable and distinctive part of the divine nature. How does the generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit produce simultaneously inseparable and distinct parts of the divine nature? Senor notes:

We can start to address the distinction question if we think of the single particular [divine] nature as being multileveled (obviously this is all metaphor). The fundamental level is the Father, the second level is the Son, and the third is the Holy Spirit; that is, the Father is the ontological ground of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. This does not imply that the Father *creates* either the Son or Holy Spirit, however, because the means by which the Son and the Holy Spirit are produced is will-independent. In any possible situation in which the Father exists, the Son and the Holy Spirit exist, and they are eternally brought about as a necessary extension of the Father's very existence. Yet there is an important asymmetry at work here: the Son and Holy Spirit are ontologically dependent on the Father, while the Father is ontologically independent of them. What does this mean? Let's say that B is ontologically dependent on A if were it not for A's productive powers, B would not exist. So even though each member of the Trinity exists necessarily and eternally, the Son and the Holy Spirit are ontologically dependent on the Father although the Father is not ontologically dependent on either of them.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Senor. 343.

The will-independent generation tenet of the model addresses how it is that the Father can be the source of the Son and (along with the Son) the source of the Holy Spirit, and yet the three persons can be equal—there is no superiority since the Father’s generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit is will-independent and thus all three are coeternal, necessary, and exist apart from anyone’s will.

Trinity Monotheism holds that God is the Trinity, that God is one substance/soul with three conscious sets of rational powers each sufficient for personhood, that something is robustly divine if it is the instantiation of the divine nature, or if it is an inseparable and distinctive part of the divine nature. Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism affirms these three tenets but also adds a mereological tenet (the three persons of the Trinity compose God) and a source-of-generation tenet (the generation of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son is will-independent). The mereological tenet endorses the Composition as Identity thesis which holds that the composition relation *is* the identity relation. The source-of-generation tenet stresses that the generation of the Son and the Holy Spirit is will-independent. These tenets, which distinguish Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism from Craig’s Trinity Monotheism, provide a number of advantages.

One advantage is that these two tenets help the model adhere to the traditional creedal trinitarian orthodoxy. Specifically, they provide the philosophical mechanisms by which to square ONE with THREE and FATHERSOURCE with EQUALITY. Another advantage is that they provide the mechanism to address the difficulty of how it is that the persons of the Trinity are somehow parts of God along with the mechanism to address the worry that the desires of three omnipotent persons might be frustrated by each other, potentially preventing omnipotence from obtaining.

The philosophical baggage of the composition tenet is not nearly as cumbersome or worrisome as some scholars argue. CAI is a defensible thesis that Trinity Monotheism seems to imply, so robustly endorsing and defending the thesis (at least insofar as it applies to the Trinity) seems advisable. Not only does the source-of-generation tenet help this model adhere to traditional creedal orthodoxy, but it helps preserve the equality, eternity, necessity, and omnipotence of the persons and it prevents the proclivity to posit unitarian conceptions of God.

Will-Independent Trinity Monotheism is a compelling logically coherent model of explication for the doctrine of the Trinity that flows naturally from both *a priori* and *a posteriori* motivations. *A priori* trinitarian consideration notes that God must be three in person to count as the perfect being of Anselmian/Perfect Being Theology. *A posteriori* considerations (Scripture and traditional creedal orthodoxy) note that God is three in person, one in being, that the persons are equal in greatness, but that the Father is the ontological source of the Son and Holy Spirit. Many trinitarian models provide explanations of how the Trinity works. Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism can stand among them as a possibly true, logically coherent *a priori* and *a posteriori* motivated trinitarian model.

Part IV—The Language of the Trinity

Section I—The Use of “God” in Scripture and Trinitarian Theorizing

A. W. Tozer claims that “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”²⁰⁶ Those who ponder or study God certainly want to have right thoughts about God. Right thinking about God requires precision. Properly writing and speaking about God also requires precision. The doctrine of the Trinity is central to Christianity

²⁰⁶ Tozer, A.W. *Knowledge of the Holy*. Harper One, 1978. P.1

and its explication demands precision. Traditional trinitarian orthodoxy makes four primary claims:

(ONE): There is one God.

(THREE): The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

(FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not).

(EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

It was argued above that a logically coherent understanding of these claims is possible, that these claims are consistent with and bolstered by both *a priori* Perfect Being Theology (and an *a priori* argument for the Trinity was defended) and *a posteriori* scriptural and creedal evidence, and that Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism is a viable model of trinitarian explication. Precision is key to all of the above arguments.

Precision is important not just in the realm of trinitarian philosophical theology but in faith settings as well. A lack of precision in churches when talking about the Trinity aids the spread of both heretical and incomplete views of God. The Christian is compelled by Scripture to “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ.”²⁰⁷ Avoiding hollow and deceptive philosophy requires having precise understanding of Christian orthodoxy. Christian orthodoxy seems to require grammatical precision. After all, outside of *a priori* considerations, Christians rely on the text of Scripture to guide their beliefs and practices, and on the text of creeds to summarize Christian orthodoxy.

William Hasker presents some grammatical observations concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and explains:

²⁰⁷ Colossians 2:8.

These reflections are needed because the doctrine is both subtle and complex, and offers traps for the unwary; apparently minor deviations from standard usage can have serious consequences. Furthermore, the long history of the doctrine has had the result that there are apparently conflicting ways of speaking about the Trinity that enjoy sanction of usage and cannot simply be rejected in the interest of uniformity of expression.²⁰⁸

The central grammatical issue revolves around the uses of the word “God.” Hasker points to three uses of the word “that occur in the vicinity of trinitarian doctrine, and serious confusion can result if they are not properly understood and distinguished.”²⁰⁹

First, *God is used to designate Yahweh the God of the Old Testament, who was known to Jesus as Father and whom he taught his followers to address as Father.* Hasker notes that identifying God as the Father is the most common usage of “God” found in the New Testament and the most common usage of the word by Christians today. According to this usage, “God,” is the Father, the First Person of the Trinity. This usage posits “God” as a title the Father possesses and even seems to function like a proper name for the Father. Indeed, Christians often refer to Jesus as the “Son of God” and prayer to God is regularly offered to “Our Father” or the “Heavenly Father.” This follows Jesus’s teaching and example of prayer known to Christians as *The Lord’s Prayer*:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.²¹⁰

Christian prayer is often addressed to the Father and closed *through* Jesus, or “in Jesus’ name.” Because this usage is the most common in the New Testament, Unitarians point to it as

²⁰⁸ Hasker, William. *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*. p. 246.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ This prayer is found in the New Testament Scriptures Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-5.

definitive and appeal to it as cause to strike other uses that are discussed in trinitarian theorizing.²¹¹

Second, *each of the three trinitarian persons can be described as “God” and can be referred to, addressed, prayed to, and worshipped as God.* This usage, unlike the first, does not function as a proper name but a property which can be ascribed to each of the persons of the Trinity. Saying that each person of the Trinity is “God” is to say that each person has the property of being (robustly) *divine*. Having this property means that each person of the Trinity is omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary. While the New Testament often identifies the Father as God, the New Testament Scriptures also explicitly refer to Jesus as “God” on several occasions.²¹² The Bible also has texts that describe the Holy Spirit’s exercise of divine powers and being involved in divine activities, which indicate his being “God,” (a robustly divine person).²¹³ While Christian prayers are most often addressed to the Father, Christians also offer prayer directly to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit.²¹⁴

This second usage posits “God” as a property which can be ascribed to each of the trinitarian persons. The most famous trinitarian formula in the New Testament is found in

²¹¹ See Dale Tuggy’s “Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies*, 40 (Sept. 2004) p. 269-87 for an example of this.

²¹² See John 1:1; John 20:28; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6-7; Hebrews 1:8; and Titus 2:13.

²¹³ See Acts 5:3-4. In verse 3 Ananias is said to have lied to the Holy Spirit and in verse 4 concerning the same action he is said to have lied to “God.” 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19 make the same interchange. See also John 14 and 16. The Holy Spirit was involved in creation (Genesis 1:2’ Psalm 33:6).

²¹⁴ Most New Testament prayers are addressed to the Father, but at least seven New Testament prayers are addressed to Jesus. See Acts 7:59; Acts 9:6; 1 Corinthians 16:22; 2 Corinthians 12:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; Revelation 22:20. 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 indicates that Christians “everywhere” prayed to Jesus. The Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26-27 is said to pray on behalf of Christians and Christians can pray to the Holy Spirit for his help (John 14-17 and Galatians 5).

Matthew 28:19 whereby Christians are commanded to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek construction of this formula indicates that the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one name. This formula helped the Holy Spirit to be recognized as a full, co-equal member of the Godhead. Under this usage, even when a particular description is given to a member of the Trinity which seems to be given in an exclusive manner, such a description should not be taken to exclude the other two trinitarian persons. Augustine makes this point:

And when [a man] hears the Father called the only God, he must not exclude the Son or the Holy Spirit from that title, for he of course is the only God together with whomever he is the one God with; so too when we hear the Son called the only God, we must accept it without in any way excluding the Father or the Holy Spirit.²¹⁵

When such descriptions are made, those being excluded are not the other persons of the Godhead, but are other beings who are not “God.” Hasker adds:

This sort of apparently exclusive reference to one Person only is far more common in the case of the Father, so it becomes important to install that *when the Father is referred to as “God,” this should not be taken as an identity statement in such a way as to exclude the Son and the Holy Spirit...*the relationship of the Father to the “one God” is not simple identity. The Father *is* God to be sure, but not in such a way that the Son and the Holy Spirit are excluded.²¹⁶

Third, “*God*” is used to refer to the Trinity as a whole. This usage, unlike the previous two, finds no explicit sanction in Scripture, yet for the trinitarian, it is unavoidable. It is, in fact, a tenet of Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism. In answer to the question, “What is God?” or “What do you mean by “God?”” answers framed in such a way as to refer to any particular person of the Godhead would be correct, and yet incomplete. A complete answer needs to include all three of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit according to a trinitarian

²¹⁵ Augustine. *The Trinity*. Book 7.

²¹⁶ Hasker, 248-49.

interpretation of Scripture and according to the traditional trinitarian orthodoxy. Since no one trinitarian person is all that God is—since no one divine person is the other divine persons, a complete answer must mention the Trinity. The complete answer to the question, “What do Christians understand God to be?” requires the answer, “God is the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

This usage of “God” to designate the Trinity which did not come to prominence until Augustine, is what Hasker calls “the metaphysical bottom line.”²¹⁷ Despite this, Hasker contends that it “seems infelicitous to try to make this the primary usage of “God.”²¹⁸ Hasker has reticence about:

[S]aying that the Persons are “are God” because they are *parts* of God, the Trinity. If we go this route we will face the difficulty of finding some sense of “part” such that the Persons are “parts of God” in that sense, and such that their being such is necessary and sufficient for the Persons’ being divine. It is much better, I believe, to explain the Godhood of the Persons...in terms of their possession of the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, and so on.²¹⁹

This concern echoes Howard-Snyder’s concern about questions like, “Is the Trinity divine?” Knowledge, power, and goodness (divine attributes) seem to be characteristics of persons, and under Trinity Monotheism and Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism, the Trinity (God) is not a person. It would be bizarre indeed to claim that the persons of the Trinity are divine, but that God is not. Fortunately, Trinity Monotheism and Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism do not couch the divinity of the persons merely in terms of being parts of God, as though being a part of the Trinity confers upon the persons omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. Rather, Trinity Monotheism and Will-

²¹⁷ Ibid. 249.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism hold that the divinity of the persons is in virtue of their being inseparable and distinct parts of the Trinity who are each endowed with omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. The difference is crucial. Consider some mere object like a mallet composed of two parts: a handle and head. The handle could exist apart from the mallet, and thus its being a part of the mallet is what allows the handle to participate in the mallet's "malletness." The handle is not what someone has in mind when she thinks of what it is to be mallet-like. Each trinitarian person, on the other hand, is a distinct omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary set of rational powers, which is what someone has in mind when she thinks of what it is to be divine. Each trinitarian person is so equipped, but no trinitarian person can exist part from the others, which is why there are not three Gods. Each trinitarian person exemplifies the property of being (robustly) divine, but only the Trinity instantiates the complete divine nature, a property of which is being triune.

So while the Trinity is not a person, Hasker notes that Trinity "can nevertheless be regarded in some contexts, and spoken of *as if* it were a single person, in the way this is often done with closely unified groups of human beings."²²⁰ The Trinity is a tri-personal being or soul, and a soul is the sort of substance which can be equipped with rational powers sufficient for personhood. Typical human beings are souls which are equipped with one such set and are thus also one person. The Trinity is a soul which is equipped with three sets of rational powers and is thus tri-personal.

This third usage allows "God" to refer to the Trinity. When this usage is employed, there is an identity claim obtaining. The Trinity is God. Various trinitarian models seek to explain how it is that the Trinity is identical to God. Will-Independent Mereological Trinity

²²⁰ Ibid.

Monotheism explains this identity claim in terms of composition. The Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) refers to the same portion of reality as does “God” since the Trinity composes God. Under this usage of “God,” referring to Trinity *as if* it were a single person is allowed. A statement like “God loves me” emphasizes the unity and singular nature of God. Such a statement means *The one God, who is the tri-personal soul composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, loves me*. Not all Christians are concerned to be as philosophically precise in their language as are those engaged in trinitarian theorizing, however. Traditional trinitarian orthodoxy understands *The one God, who is the tri-personal soul composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, loves me*, as a philosophically precise statement, the shorthand for which is “God loves me.”

Of course, the only way for language to work well—to be consistent with Christian orthodoxy—is for the precise meaning of language, even if not precisely stated, to be based on an acceptable philosophical explication of that orthodoxy. This project seeks to provide an acceptable philosophical explication of the doctrine of the Trinity. That doctrine must be logically coherent, and a possible model of how that doctrine works must be advanced. The strength of Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism rests in its adherence to the traditional trinitarian orthodoxy found in the creedal affirmations and its explanation of how the Trinity composes God. Such an explanation fits both the *a posteriori* motivation for trinitarianism and the *a priori* motivation to understand the Greatest Conceivable Being. Both lines of motivation can be logically explained under this model.

The importance of precise language concerning God cannot be overestimated. Which usage of “God” is best for the Christian to embrace? Hasker claims that all three usages of the word “God” discussed above are either scriptural or are necessitated by the nature of God and

that context will determine which usage should be understood. But what of Hasker's claim that it is infelicitous to try to make the third usage the primary use? Here an important distinction must be drawn between Scripture's primary use of "God" and the Christian's primary use of "God." Certainly Christians should want to properly understand the word "God" as Scripture uses it, but Scripture is not univocal in its use. Similarly, the Christian should want to employ the best use of the word "God" and seek to be properly understood when employing it. So how should the Christian most often use the word "God?"

Since the metaphysical bottom line is that the Trinity is God, the Christian's use of the word "God" *should* primarily be to refer to the Trinity. "God"-as-Trinity should be the default meaning of the word, and context will determine if "God" is meant to refer to a particular trinitarian person—if the property of divinity is being ascribed to a particular trinitarian person. Such a contention addresses the second and third uses Hasker identifies, but what of the first usage?

Recall the first usage Hasker identifies. *God is used to designate Yahweh the God of the Old Testament, who was known to Jesus as Father and whom he taught his followers to address as Father.* This usage can be split apart into two aspects: the name of the God of the Old Testament, and how the God of the Old Testament was known to Jesus personally and in his teachings. Concerning the first aspect, "Yahweh" is the most common proper name for God in the Old Testament. Interestingly, in Old Testament usage "Yahweh" refers to God both as a plurality and also as a single being in the Old Testament. Consider the following Old Testament passages:

Genesis 3:22 “And the Lord God (Yahweh) said, ‘The man has now become like one of *us*, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’”

Genesis 11:6-7 “The Lord (Yahweh) said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let *us* go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.’”

Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God (Yahweh), the Lord is *one*.”

Both of the Genesis passages use the name Yahweh when referring to God as a plurality.²²¹ The Deuteronomy passage uses the name Yahweh when declaring that there is only one God. The proper name Yahweh certainly refers to the God of the Old Testament, but those references do not exclusively apply to a singular person. This is just what a trinitarian would expect. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity holds that Jesus is the Son—the second person of the Trinity. Trinitarian orthodoxy holds that the Son is eternally a member of the Godhead. If this is so, then the God of the Old Testament is triune because God is triune. The proper name Yahweh applies to the triune God. Yahweh is the Trinity. All this, while not fully revealed until the New Testament, is consistent with Old Testament linguistics.

Concerning the second aspect, how is the God of the Old Testament known to Jesus? In other words, to whom is Jesus referring when he says “Father?” The wording Hasker employs (*Yahweh...who was known to Jesus as Father and whom he taught his followers to address as Father*) indicates that Jesus refers to Yahweh as “Father.” This is not precise, however. Jesus

²²¹ See also Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, “Let *us* make mankind in our image, in *our* likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” This verse does not use “Yahweh” for God, but “Elohim,” another of the more common Old Testament names for God.

addressed his prayers to the Father and not to Yahweh because Jesus prayed to the Father and not to Yahweh as a whole. When Jesus prayed, the second person of the Trinity was praying to the first person of the Trinity. Jesus also used the more generic “God” (*theos* in Greek) when teaching about God. Jesus says in Matthew 4:4, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (*theos*).” And in perhaps the most well-known New Testament verse, John 3:16, Jesus says “For God (*theos*) so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

It seems that when Jesus was praying to or referring to the first person of the Trinity, he used “Father.” In some instances Jesus uses the term “God” (*theos*) when referring to the Father. It also seems that when Jesus was not exclusively referring to the first person of the Trinity, but to God as a whole, he used “God” (*theos*). It does not seem that when Jesus referred to the Father, he had in mind Yahweh, or God as a whole. In fact, Jesus identifies himself with the description Yahweh used of himself (“I am”) in John 8:58. Yahweh is the proper name of God and not a name Jesus uses to refer to the Father. The more intimate “Father” (*pater* in Greek, *abba* in Aramaic) was used by Jesus when addressing the trinitarian person who is the Father. So what is to be made of this first identified usage?

The first usage of “God” Hasker identified is essentially an identity claim, whereby the Father is identical to God. Hasker claims that this is the most common use of “God,” but it is vital to recall Hasker’s caveat, *When the Father is referred to as “God,” this should not be taken as an identity statement in such a way as to exclude the Son and the Holy Spirit.* If referring to God as the Father is not an identity statement that should be taken in such a way as to exclude the Son and the Holy Spirit, then it seems that an identity claim is being made which equates the Trinity to God, which is really just the third usage Hasker identified. Or is referring to God as

the Father in such a way that does not exclude the Son and the Holy Spirit an identity claim at all? Perhaps it is doing the work of ascribing the property of being divine to the Father? If so, this is just an example of the second usage Hasker identifies.

This analysis indicates that the word “God” actually has only two primary uses in Scripture. The first is to refer to God as a whole—the full nature of God, which is the Trinity. This usage is found in both the Old and the New Testaments even though the Trinity was not fully revealed until the New Testament. When the proper name “Yahweh” is used in the Old Testament and the proper name “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is used in the New Testament, those names refer to the triune God. The second use is to refer to a particular trinitarian person. This second use is not a proper identity claim, but an ascription of divinity to either the Holy Spirit, the Son (Jesus), or the Father. When the New Testament Scriptures use “God,” and context makes it clear that the Father is intended, such uses are examples of the second variety. The Father is most often referred to as “God.” Jesus (the Son) is referred to as “God” on occasion, but more often he is referred to as “Lord,” which is another way of ascribing the property of being divine to Jesus. In fact, referring to Jesus as the “Lord” (*Kurios* in Greek) is merely to refer to Jesus with the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Adonai* which was written and spoken in place of “YHWH (Yahweh)” so Jews could reverently avoid saying the proper name for God.

When reading Scripture, the use of “God” can be a reference to God as a whole (who is referred to as both plural in person and single in being), or it can ascribe the property of being divine to any of the trinitarian persons. Certain New Testament passages using “God” do not specifically refer to any particular trinitarian person, but context can make clear if a specific person is intended or if the use of “God,” applies to the whole Godhead.

Section II—Suggested Use of Language for Contemporary Christians

If, as Tozer suggests, that what comes to mind when thinking about God is the most important thing about a person, then those committed to traditional trinitarian orthodoxy should seek to think about rightly and should help others to think about God rightly. There is a disturbing trend toward imprecision when it comes to speaking about God within the church. Haphazard language in Bible teaching, in sermons, in conversation, and even in prayer can prevent some people from understanding very important commitments concerning God. Those with precise and orthodox views of God should endeavor to speak rightly about God personally and should promote occasions for precision within the congregational church setting. The theological milieu one experiences will have a tremendous impact on one's theological views.

Every opportunity to work the Trinity into corporate liturgy should be taken. An excellent example of this is the pattern that some churches have of reciting the “Doxology:”

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*²²²

This very short hymn is easily memorized, especially when recited weekly. Its power resides in its simple cadence, rhyme scheme, and its call to “Praise God...Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” Other simple choices that can be made to deepen the precision and trinitarian orthodoxy of a church's theological milieu include utilization of specific phrases in lessons, sermons, and prayers. Christians might consider using the following statements and words in this manner:

²²² First published in 1709 by composer, Anglican Bishop Thomas Ken.

“God”—When Christians hear or read this word they should think *Trinity*. The Trinity is God. Therefore, the best usage of the word “God” for the contemporary Christian is as a reference to the Trinity. “God” should mean *Trinity* unless the reference functions as an ascription of the property *divine* to a particular trinitarian person.

Too many Christians hear “God” and think *Father*. It is not wholly inappropriate to do this, but it is wholly incomplete and somewhat inaccurate. “God” is not a proper name. “God” is a title or an office that someone holds. In this sense, “God” functions very similarly to “Mr. President” or “Champ.” There is an office of the President, but “Mr. President” is not the name of the person who holds that office and warrants that title. Likewise, there is a title of Heavyweight Champion of the World in the sport of boxing, but “Champ” (an appropriate shorthand for Heavyweight Champion of the World) is not the name of the person who holds that position and warrants that title.

Addressing the person who holds the office of President as “Mr. President” is appropriate, but that title belongs to anyone who has ever held that office. Imagine an occasion where the current and former Presidents gather and someone says, “Excuse me, Mr. President, please wave to the gallery.” It would be appropriate for Donald Trump, Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton all to raise their hands and wave to the gallery since the title “Mr. President” stays with the person who held the office. In the same way, “God” is the title or office that the Greatest Conceivable Being holds. That being is the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since “God” is an acceptable ascription of the property *being (robustly) divine*, “God” may be used in reference to any of the trinitarian persons, but when a trinitarian person is referred to as “God,” no identity claim is obtaining, since no individual trinitarian person is identical to God. The analogy between “God” and “Mr. President” is not exact because there is

only one current President and there are three omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary persons, but the point stands. Hearing “God” and thinking *Father* is like hearing “Mr. President” and thinking *Donald Trump*. It is appropriate, but not complete since there are (two) other persons that also have the property of *being (robustly) divine* and there are four other living *Mr. Presidents*. Scripture often says “God” when referring to the Father, but such a use is not and should not be interpreted as an identity claim. After all, Scripture also says “God” when referring to Jesus. When “God” refers to a particular trinitarian person, such references ascribe the property of *divinity* to that person, not identity.

“God the Father,” “God the Son,” “God the Spirit”—These phrases can provide greater precision when ascribing the property of divinity to the trinitarian persons. Since so many Christians hear “God” and think *Father*, it is wise of Christians to specify which trinitarian person is being referred to if indeed God as a whole is not in view. These phrases emphasize the triune nature of God. Since God is the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, saying “God the Father” helps reinforce the idea that the Father, while divine, is not all that God is. While these phrases rarely arise in Scripture, they can be deployed in summary of scriptural content. For instance, consider the following summary of the Christian faith:

The story of God is the story of the perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, eternal, necessary, and triune creator of heaven and earth. The tri-personal God made all there is, and the pinnacle of God’s creation is humankind, who was made in God’s image and thus endowed with rationality and freedom. Unfortunately, humankind used its freedom poorly, choosing to rebel against God, deciding to sin. But since God is perfect, God cannot stand to be around sin, so humankind was banished from God’s presence and humankind suffered war, famine, disease, and death. But since God is perfect, God wanted to be with humankind, so God established a

system of animal sacrifice to temporarily cover humankind's sins and make way for God's ultimate act of love. God the Father sent God the Son (Jesus) to live on earth as a perfect and sinless human. Good News!: Jesus who is God the Son died on the cross, paying for the sins of humans who would believe in him, transferring his own righteousness to them. God the Spirit raised God the Son from the dead, validating Jesus' sacrifice. By accepting this good news, humans are saved, and God the Spirit will indwell them, empowering them to live for and with God forever.

The above paragraph is an acceptable summary of the orthodox Christian story of redemption and is acceptably precise. God is the Trinity, yet each trinitarian person is referred to as "God the Father," "God the Son," and "God the Spirit," respectively. This avoids the confusion that comes with hearing "God" and thinking *Father*.

"The Father is God"—This is a statement of ascription which predicates the property of being divine of the Father. This is not a statement of identity because the Father is not everything that God is. He is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. It is better to communicate this meaning with "The Father is divine" or "The Father is part of the very nature of God."

"Jesus is God"—This is a statement of ascription which predicates the property of being divine of Jesus (the Son). This is not a statement of identity because Jesus is not everything that God is. He is not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit. It is better to communicate this meaning with "Jesus is divine" or "Jesus is part of the very nature of God."

"The Holy Spirit is God"—This is a statement of ascription which predicates the property of being divine of the Holy Spirit. This is not a statement of identity because the Holy Spirit is not everything that God is. He is not the Father, nor the Son. It is better to communicate this meaning with "The Holy Spirit is divine" or "The Holy Spirit is part of the very nature of God."

“Dear Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit”—This can be a way to open up public and private prayer. It is true that when Jesus instructed his followers to pray, his example prayer was addressed to “Our Father,” but Jesus was incarnate at the time and it would have seemed bizarre for him to pray to God as a whole since Jesus (the Son) is an inseparable part of God as a whole. When Jesus prayed, he spoke to his Father, so he naturally instructed his followers to do likewise. Because other New Testament prayers are addressed to the Father and the Son, and some exclusively to Jesus, the Christian is under no compulsion to pray exclusively to the Father. The address, “Dear Heavenly Father,” however, is the most common prayer opening. This, along with thinking *Father* when “God” is mentioned, is imprecision that may promote subordinationism. Congregants tend to emulate what they hear corporately. A simple variation in how prayers are addressed can produce significant change in the theological milieu of the contemporary Christian.²²³

Conclusion

The doctrine of the Trinity is at the heart of Christian Theology as it is central to the Christian conception of God. Traditional Christian orthodoxy views God as the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This most central Christian doctrine is mysterious to be sure, but the doctrine of the Trinity can be understood and can be formulated in a logically

²²³ In my time as a minister, I committed to opening every single public prayer I prayed with “Dear Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit: I call upon your triune name...” I have done this for over a decade. A number of congregation members began to address their public prayers likewise. While anecdotal in nature, my experience is that if precise trinitarian language is regularly used, others will emulate that language and greater contemplative accuracy will obtain concerning God.

coherent fashion. The motivation for the doctrine comes from both *a priori* and *a posteriori* considerations.

Perfect Being Theology holds that God is the Greatest Conceivable Being and as such God must possess to a maximal degree the essential great-making properties of omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence (moral perfection and love), eternity, and necessary existence inherently. The Perfect Being must not need to first create in order to exemplify these properties or else that being would be dependent upon something outside of itself to demonstrate perfection. It is reasoned that in order to demonstrate or exemplify perfect love, the Perfect Being must demonstrate or exemplify all the aspects of love: self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared. A singularly personal being can demonstrate self-love, but could not give love to another, receive love from another, or share love with another apart from creating another with whom to enjoy reciprocal love and creating still another for them to jointly love. No aspect of love requires essentially four or more persons, so the Perfect Being need only be tri-personal. Thus, to demonstrate all the aspects of love, the Perfect Being must be (at least) tri-personal. Recall the specific formulation of an *a priori* argument for a triune Perfect Being above:

1. God is the Greatest Conceivable Being (GCB).
2. Any great-making property God/GCB possesses must be possessed to a maximal degree essentially.
3. Love/benevolence is a great-making property God/GCB possesses.
4. Maximal love/benevolence includes self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared (cooperative love of a third).
5. A singularly personal being cannot possess love-given, love-received, or love-shared essentially.
6. A dually personal being cannot possess love-shared essentially.
7. Therefore, God/GCB must be at least a tri-personal being.
8. Simplicity is a great-making property.
9. Being tri-personal is the simplest way to possess maximal love/benevolence.
10. No other great-making property requires the GCB be multi-personal.
11. Therefore, God/GCB is a tri-personal being.

This argument stands in the tradition of other *a priori* arguments for the triune nature of God advanced by both ancient (Richard of St. Victor) and contemporary sources (Swinburne).

Christian Scripture and early Christian creeds provide the framework for the explication of the doctrine of the Trinity. Scripture reveals that there is only one God, but that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are all divine and can be called “God,” and yet the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons. The early church wrestled with the doctrine, and managed to formulate the essential content of the doctrine in early ecumenical creeds. The creeds that best encapsulate the doctrine are the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. The Nicene Creed states:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father... We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. Who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. Amen.

The Athanasian Creed states:

Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. 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 of the Holy Spirit, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Spirit unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty; but one Almighty. 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. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is neither made, nor created, nor begotten. The Son is neither made, nor created; but begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeds from the Father (and the Son). So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as said earlier; we must worship the unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity.

This traditional creedal orthodoxy may be distilled into the following affirmations:

(ONE): There is one God.

(THREE): The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons.

(FATHERSOURCE): The Father is the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit (perhaps with the Son, perhaps not).

(EQUALITY): The three persons in the Trinity are ontologically equal; none is greater than any of the others.

These four affirmations present a certain degree of mystery and tension, but the charge of outright incoherence is regularly levied against the Trinity. To defend the logical coherence of the Trinity, it must be shown that these four affirmations form a self-consistent set. Tension exists between ONE and THREE and between FATHERSOURCE and EQUALITY. How is it that three distinct divine persons are one God? How can the divine persons be equal if one of those persons is in some sense the source of the other two? These questions require important distinctions be made.

One important distinction is between “being” and “person.” If the doctrine held that God is one being and three beings or one person and three persons, then the charge of logical incoherence would stand, but the doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is one being, yet three persons. A being is a soul or substance. A person is a collection of rational powers like consciousness, self-determination, and volition. A divine person is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, eternal, and necessary. One way to explain how it is that God is one being and three persons is to understand that an identity relation obtains between the three persons and the one being, which is to say that the three persons *are* the one being. One possible way to explain

the identity relation between the three persons and the one being is with the concept of composition.

Composition as Identity (CAI) is the thesis that the composition relation *is* the identity relation. Common language uses the CAI thesis regularly when distinguishing between something that can be described using various cardinality. Multiple descriptions invoke different cardinality while describing the same portion of reality. For instance, the description *two shoes* picks out the same portion of reality as the description *one pair of shoes*. Similarly, the descriptions *one deck*, *four suits*, and *52 cards* all pick out the same portion of reality. In the same way, the trinitarian description *one being* and *three persons* each pick out the same portion of reality—God.

Another important distinction is between “generate” and “create.” Traditional creedal trinitarian orthodoxy holds that the Father generates, but does not create the Son and the Holy Spirit. The generation of the Son is known as begetting. The Son is said to be eternally begotten of the Father. The generation of the Holy Spirit is known as spiration or procession. The Holy Spirit is said to eternally proceed from the Father (and the Son). These two forms of generation are not creation. When someone is begotten or spirated, that person is of the same kind as the one begetting or spirating. When something is created, it is of a different kind than the one creating. Since the Father begets the Son, and since the Father (and the Son) spirate the Holy Spirit, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not created and thus are of the same kind as the Father. So long as this generation is eternal, necessary, and will-independent, then the ones generated and the one who generates can be of equal ontological greatness.

These distinctions allow ONE, THREE, FATHERSOUCE, and EQUALITY to form a self-consistent set. The discussion of logical coherence is conceptual in nature. That is, the

doctrine may be logically coherent, but mere logical coherence does not mean that the doctrine is true, just possibly true—not impossible. Motivation for thinking the doctrine of the Trinity true can come from *a priori* Perfect Being Theology and from *a posteriori* Scripture and creedal considerations.

To move beyond motivations for and a demonstration of the logical coherence of the doctrine and to try to explain how the Trinity works, explanatory models of the Trinity are offered. Those models fall into two primary camps. Latin Trinitarianism (LT) which places greater emphasis on the unity of God as one being, and Social Trinitarianism (ST), which places greater emphasis on the diversity of the three persons. The central commitment of LT models is God's unicity of will and intellect that is not in any way threatened by the diversity of persons. The central commitment of ST is that God possesses three sets of rational powers each sufficient for divine personhood. In keeping with traditional trinitarian orthodoxy, explanatory models should avoid the three big trinitarian heresies: tritheism, which posits three divine beings; modalism, which denies the distinctness of the three persons; and subordinationism, which denies the equality of the three persons.

The model defended here is Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism, a ST model. This model has five tenets:

- (1) God is the Trinity.
- (2) God is one substance/soul equipped with three conscious sets of rational powers.
- (3) Something is (robustly) divine if it is the instantiation of the divine nature, or if it is an inseparable and distinctive part of the divine nature.
- (4) The three persons of the Trinity compose God.
- (5) The generation of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son is will-independent.

(1) Is the identity tenet. The Trinity is identical to God. This means that the Trinity fully exhausts the category “God.” In answer to the question, “What do you understand God to be?” the answer is, “The Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (2) is the social tenet. God is one being, but three persons. This is because God just is a soul that is equipped with three centers of consciousness, each sufficient for personhood.

(3) explains that there are two ways for something to be (robustly) divine. One way is to be the instantiation of the divine nature. Since there is only one God, there is only one full and complete instantiation of the divine nature. That is to say, only one thing, the Trinity, instantiates the divine nature, a property of which is being triune. The trinitarian persons are not instantiations of the full and complete divine nature because none of them is triune, but each is (robustly) divine in virtue of being inseparable and distinctive parts of the divine nature. That is to say, each person is necessary for the one being/soul to instantiate the full and complete divine nature. Each trinitarian person is robustly divine because each instantiates the nature of *a divine person*, the properties of which include omnipotence, omniscience, moral perfection, eternity, and necessity. This robust divinity is not merely grounded in the person’s being inseparable parts of the Trinity, but in each trinitarian person’s possession of the previously enumerated divine attributes. This distinguishes the person’s divinity from a lesser, separable understanding of “being divine,” as in the way a divine plan is divine.

(4) is the mereological tenet. The Trinity composes God. “God” and “The Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” pick out the same portion of reality. The identity relation established in (1) is explained, here, in terms of composition. This tenet embraces the composition as identity thesis, which allows for one-many identity relations to obtain. Classical understanding of identity restricts the identity relation to one-one or many-many. A flaw in the

classical understanding of identity is to suppose that each individual part of a composite is identical to the whole. Were this the case, then each trinitarian person individually would be identical to God, and either there would be three Gods or there would only be one person with three names. It is better to understand identity using the CAI thesis, whereby the three persons taken collectively are identical to God.

(5) is the generation tenet. The Father generates the Son. The Father and the Son generate the Holy Spirit. Importantly, the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit are necessary, eternal, and will-independent. If the generation of the Son and Holy Spirit is not necessary, eternal, and will-independent, then they are not equal in greatness with the Father since they are either contingent, temporal, or dependent upon the will of the Father. If their generation is by the will of the Father, then they are not equal in greatness with the Father as their existence depends on the Father's will. Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism seems to be a viable explanatory model of the triune God.

The word "God" has two primary uses: to refer to the Trinity, and to refer to a particular trinitarian person, that is, to ascribe the property of *being divine* to a particular trinitarian person. Since the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit composes God, when the Christian hears the word "God," she should think *Trinity* as a default, and can shift to think *Father*, or *Jesus (the Son)*, or *Holy Spirit* if the context dictates. God is identified with and named Yahweh in the Old Testament. There, Yahweh is referred to as multiple in person and as singular in being. In the New Testament, God is revealed to be the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There, the word "God" is used most often to refer to the Father, but such reference should not be understood to exclude the Son and the Spirit. Most often, the Son is referred to as "Lord," which

is another way of ascribing the property of being divine to Jesus. The Christian can and should pray to the triune God since God is triune.

The doctrine of the Trinity can be motivated by both *a priori* Perfect Being Theology and *a posteriori* scriptural interpretation and traditional creedal orthodoxy. The doctrine is logically coherent, and Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism stands as a viable explanatory model of the doctrine.

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