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A LEFTOVIAN TRINITY?

William Hasker

Brian Leftow has proposed a “Latin” doctrine of the Trinity according to which “the Father *just is* God,” and so also for the Son and the Spirit. I argue that Leftow’s doctrine as he presents it really does have the consequence that Father, Son, and Spirit are all identical, a consequence that is inconsistent with orthodox Trinitarianism. A fairly minor modification would enable Leftow to avoid this untoward consequence. But the doctrine as modified will still retain a strongly modalistic flavor: it implies, among other things, that the prayers of Jesus in the Gospels are instances of God-as-Son *praying to himself*, namely to God-as-Father. If this is found unacceptable, Leftow may have been too quick to dismiss Social Trinitarianism.

The past half-century has seen a revival and outpouring of theological work on the doctrine of the Trinity that may be unmatched since the early centuries of Christianity. Much of this work has been centered on “social” doctrines of the Trinity, doctrines in which Father, Son, and Spirit are said to be distinct “persons,” where the word ‘person’ retains much of its familiar meaning derived from its application to human persons.¹ This renewed interest in the doctrine has been shared also by Christian philosophers, and here also Social Trinitarianism has been well represented. There have also, however, been pointed critiques of Social Trinitarianism (ST), with perhaps the most thorough coming from Brian Leftow.² He has written, “one basic problem for ST is showing that it is a form of monotheism . . . if my arguments are sound, it is not clear that ST can be orthodox or truly

¹For this claim and numerous references see Tom McCall, “Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism Again: A Response to Brian Leftow,” *Philosophia Christi* 5:2 (2003), pp. 405–430.

²See Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 203–249. Further critiques will be found in Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Trinity Monotheism,” *Philosophia Christi* 5:2 (2003), pp. 375–403; and Jeffrey E. Brower, “The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: A Reply to Wierenga,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21:3 (July 2004), pp. 295–303. Three articles by Dale Tuggy criticize both Social Trinitarianism and Latin Trinitarianism; see “The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing,” *Religious Studies* 39 (June 2003), pp. 165–183; “Tradition and Believability: Edward Wierenga’s Social Trinitarianism,” *Philosophia Christi* 5:3 (2003), pp. 447–456; and “Divine Deception, Identity, and Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies* 40 (September 2004), pp. 269–287.



monotheist."³ He concludes, "If ST's prospects do not look good, the moral one ought to draw is that it is time to reconsider LT [Latin Trinitarianism]."⁴ Leftow carries out such a reconsideration in his article, "A Latin Trinity,"⁵ and it is his proposal in this article that will be examined here.

Two points need to be made before we launch into the main agenda of the paper. The first concerns the label to be applied to Leftow's proposal. His own term for it, as shown in the title of his paper, is "Latin Trinitarianism" (LT). However, I prefer not to use this term, since I am not prepared to concede that his proposal is equivalent to the classical doctrine of the Trinity as expounded by such worthies as Augustine and Aquinas. An earlier article of Leftow's is entitled "Anti Social Trinitarianism," and I considered labeling his view as "Anti-Social Trinitarianism." But I have settled for the neutral term, "Leftovian Trinitarianism" (LEFT), which identifies his view without prejudging the question as to just what that view amounts to.

The other point is that in this essay I will of necessity leave undiscussed a good deal of what Leftow says in his paper. Brian Leftow is gifted with an exceptionally fertile metaphysical imagination, and as a result his writings contain a rich profusion of arguments, proposals, and metaphysical ideas. Examining these ideas carefully (as is necessary in a study such as this one) typically takes considerably more space than was occupied by Leftow's original statement of them. So in order to keep the present essay within reasonable bounds I have had to select what seem to me to be the most important things he says and limit my comments to them. This of course exposes me to the complaint that I have neglected other things in his essay, and that had I considered those other things my conclusions about his view would be undermined. My only defense against this is to select as carefully as I can those items that really are of central importance; if nevertheless I am judged to have omitted something crucial, the issue may have to be revisited.

Leftow begins his exposition of LEFT with quotations from the Athanasian Creed, the Creed of the Council of Toledo, and Aquinas. The latter wrote,

among creatures, the nature the one generated receives is not numerically identical with the nature the one generating has . . . But God begotten receives numerically the same nature God begetting has. (p. 305)⁶

³Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 249.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Brian Leftow, "A Latin Trinity," *Faith and Philosophy* 21:3 (July 2004), pp. 304–333. Page numbers in the text refer to this article. Leftow returned to the task of Trinitarian theorizing in a later article, "Modes Without Modalism" (in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2007], pp. 357–375). This article presents essentially the same understanding of Trinitarian doctrine as "A Latin Trinity" with additional metaphysical elaboration. The present discussion is confined to Leftow's views as stated in the earlier article.

⁶The reference is to the *Summa Theologiae* Ia, 39, 5 ad 2, 245a; Leftow's translation.

Leftow explains Thomas' talk of "natures" in terms of "tropes": "Abel and Cain were both human. So they had the same nature, humanity. Yet each also had his own nature, and Cain's humanity was not identical with Abel's. . . . On one parsing, this is because while the two had the same nature, they had distinct tropes of that nature. A trope is an individualized case of an attribute. Their bearers individuate tropes: Cain's humanity is distinct from Abel's just because it is Cain's, not Abel's."⁷ He then continues, "With this term in hand, I now restate Thomas' claim: while both the Father and Son instance the divine nature (deity) they have but one trope of deity between them, which is God's. While Cain's humanity ≠ Abel's humanity, the Father's deity = the Son's deity = God's deity. But bearers individuate tropes. If the Father's deity is God's this is because the Father *just is* God: which last is what Thomas wants to say" (p. 305).⁸

Leftow recognizes, however, that this poses a problem for his view:

On LT, then, there clearly is just one God, but one wonders just how the Persons manage to be three. If the Father "just is" God, it seems to follow that

1. the Father = God.

If "each single Person is wholly God in Himself," and both Son and Father have God's trope of deity, it seems also to follow that

2. the Son = God.

But then since

3. God = God,

it seems to follow that

4. the Father = the Son,

and that on LT, there is just one divine Person. (p. 305)

Leftow goes on to explain why it seems impossible for a Trinitarian doctrine to reject either or both of (1) and (2) and remain orthodox. (1) of course, is the view he has attributed to Thomas, and is the cornerstone of Leftovian Trinitarianism. As regards (2), he says, "Everything is either God, an uncreated object distinct from God or a creature" (p. 306). So if

⁷I believe Leftow's rephrasing in terms of tropes is genuinely helpful. A problem arises because in modern philosophy a "nature" is typically taken to be something abstract; fundamentally, a nature is a set of attributes or properties. The "natures" referred to by ancient and medieval writers were, however, concrete rather than abstract: Christ's "human nature" consists of his body and soul, not of a set of attributes. Paraphrasing Thomas' term "nature" as meaning "trope" prevents confusion on this point.

⁸So far as I can tell, Thomas does not say this—and if he did say it explicitly, I strongly suspect that Leftow would give us the quotation. To be sure, it could be that Thomas "wanted" to say this, but just didn't manage to get it said. I doubt, however, that Thomas Aquinas would be high on most people's lists of writers who wanted to say things but never managed to actually say them.

(2) is rejected, the only alternatives are that the Son is an uncreated object distinct from God, or that he is a creature, both clearly options Leftow would reject. He seems, then, to be firmly committed to the truth of both (1) and (2). For convenience, I will label (1)–(4) as the One Person Argument; finding a satisfactory answer to this argument becomes a major part of Leftow’s agenda.

An important role is played in the exposition and defense of Leftovian Trinitarianism by an extended example featuring (as is appropriate for a former New Yorker) the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes:⁹

You are at Radio City Music Hall, watching the Rockettes kick in unison. You notice that they look quite a bit alike. But (you think) they must just be made up to look that way. After all, . . . they certainly seem to be many different women. But appearances deceive. Here is the true story. All the Rockettes but one, Jane, called in sick that morning. So Jane came to work with a time machine her nephew had put together for the school science fair. Jane ran on-stage to her position at the left of the chorus line, linked up, kicked her way through the number, then ran off. She changed her makeup, donned a wig, then stepped into her nephew’s Wells-o-matic, to emerge in the past, just before the Rockettes went on. She ran on-stage from a point just to the right of her first entry, stepped into line second from the chorus line’s left, smiled and whispered a quip to the woman on her right, kicked her way through the number, then ran off. She then changed her makeup again . . . Can one person thus be wholly in many places at once? The short answer is: she is in many places at the same point in *our* lives, but not the same point in *hers*. If Jane travels in time, distinct segments of her life coincide with the same segment of ours. To put this another way, Jane’s personal timeline intersects one point in ours repeatedly. (p. 307; second ellipsis in original)

Now, however, it becomes possible to construct an analogue for the One Person Argument (call this the One Rockette Argument):

in this story, there is among all the Rockettes just one trope of human nature. All tropes of human nature in the Rockettes are identical. But consider this argument:

- 1a. the leftmost Rockette = Jane.
- 2a. the rightmost Rockette = Jane.
- 3a. Jane = Jane.

So,

- 4a. the leftmost Rockette = the rightmost Rockette.

The argument appears sound, but doesn’t shorten the chorus line. There is just one substance, Jane, in the chorus line. But there *is* also

⁹See pp. 307–309, “Time-travel, Tap-dancing, and the Trinity.” (But since when has what the Rockettes do been called *tap-dancing*?)

an extended chorus line, with many of *something* in it. Many what, one asks? Some philosophers think that Jane is a four-dimensional object, extended through time as well as space—that not Jane’s life but Jane herself has earlier and later parts. If this is true, each Rockette is a temporal part of Jane. If (as I believe) Jane has no temporal parts, then not just a temporal part of Jane, but Jane as a whole, appears at each point in the chorus line, and what the line contains many of are segments or episodes of Jane’s life-events. . . . What you see are many dancings of one substance. . . . Each Rockette is Jane. But in these many events, Jane is there many times over. (pp. 307–308)

And “If God as the Persons is relevantly like Jane as the Rockettes, then just as (1a)–(4a) did not shorten the chorus line, (1)–(4) do not collapse the Trinity” (p. 316). The One Person Argument, in other words, is “sound but irrelevant” (p. 316). We shall consider Leftow’s reasons for these claims after we’ve examined some other features of his position.

Now it is well known that there are philosophical objections to time travel, objections which in the opinion of some philosophers render the notion incoherent. And it would seem to be a defect in a philosophical argument such as Leftow’s if it depends crucially on a logically incoherent example. Recognizing this, he spends a considerable amount of effort in attempting to resolve the “paradoxes of time travel.” I don’t think this effort is wholly successful (and he would probably agree), but I don’t propose to contest this point with him. Instead, I will grant him his example and try to see what benefit he can derive from it.

At this point we need to examine the positive explanation Leftow gives concerning the nature of the Trinitarian Persons. Here is what he says:

Suppose, then, that God’s life has the following peculiar structure: at any point in our lives, three discrete parts of God’s life are present. But this is not because one life’s successive parts appear at once. Rather, it is because God always lives His life in three discrete strands at once, no event of His life occurring in more than one strand and no strand succeeding another. In one strand God lives the Father’s life, in one the Son’s, and in one the Spirit’s. The events of each strand add up to the life of a Person. The lives of the Persons add up to the life God lives *as* the three Persons. There is one God, but He is many in the events of his life, as Jane was in the chorus line: being the Son is a bit like being the leftmost Rockette. (p. 312)

In a note, Leftow further clarifies this by stating that the strands do not have in common “any events composing His conscious life or involving His agency” (p. 330, n. 22). Furthermore, “every event in God’s life is part of the Father-Son-Spirit chorus line; God does not live save as Father, Son and Spirit. . . . God’s life always consists of three other things which count as entire ongoing lives” (p. 312).

But how is this multiplication of life-strands in God possible? To answer this, Leftow draws yet again on the Rockette story. What makes that story work, he tells us, is “the causal relations between her life-segments. These are segments of one individual’s life not because they succeed one another

in a timeline but because the right causal relations link them" (p. 313).¹⁰ But then "we can suppose that causal relations do the like without succession in the Trinitarian case: that is, we can suppose that causal relations between the event-streams involved are what make them all streams within one individual's life" (p. 314). These causal relations consist in the eternal "begetting" of the Son by the Father, and the eternal "spiration" of the Spirit from Father and Son. (Leftow observes that "Nobody has ever claimed to explain how these work, so I'm at no disadvantage if I do not either" (p. 314).) Leftow goes on to offer some fascinating reflections concerning the nature of the Persons and the distinction between them:

If one asks what sort of persons the Persons are, on this account, the right answer is that they are whatever sort God is—the Persons just *are* God, as the Latin approach will have it. . . . Just as Jane has her own thoughts while she is the left- and rightmost Rockettes, God has His own thoughts as Father and Son. But just as Jane does not think her leftmost thoughts at the point in her life at which she is rightmost, God does not think His Father-thoughts at the points in His life at which He is Son. Just as Jane can token with truth "I am the leftmost Rockette" and "I am the rightmost," God can token with truth "I am the Father" and "I am the Son." But just as Jane cannot token both claims with truth at the same points in her life, God cannot token with truth "I am the Son" at points in His life at which He is Father. Just as Jane at the leftmost spot on the chorus line has no internal access to and is not thinking the thoughts she thinks at the rightmost spot, God as Father has no internal access to and is not thinking the thoughts of God as Son. So the Son is as distinct from the Father as the leftmost Rockette is from the rightmost, and the Son's mind is as distinct from the Father's as the leftmost's is from rightmost's. (pp. 314–315)¹¹

At this point a fascinating way of thinking about the Trinity has begun to emerge, but we need to think very carefully in order to be clear about it.

¹⁰There seems to be a metaphysical oddity in Leftow's argument at this point. The notion that personal identity (specifically, Jane's identity across multiple life-segments) results from causal relations is most at home in an event-based ontology, in which continuing objects (in particular, minds or persons) are constructed out of events. Leftow's ontology, however, is substance-based, and so it seems he ought to take personal identity over time as primitive, rather than as resulting from causal relations. Leftow, however, argues that it makes perfectly good sense to have an ontology in which substances are ontologically basic but in which the persistence of substances depends on causal relations. (See "Modes Without Modalism.")

¹¹A referee observes that "the big disanalogy is that Jane-on-the-left and Jane-on-the-right do not exist at simultaneous points in Jane's life but (ignoring timelessness) the Trinitarian Persons do exist at simultaneous points in their lives." This is indeed an important difference; in order to bridge the gap Leftow must consider the different episodes in Jane's life and the different strands of experience in God's life as analogous; both constitute "points" in their respective lives. If one finds this analogy unconvincing, the story about Jane contributes rather little to our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

One's initial response to Leftow's account might well be something like this: All right, there are these three "strands" of experience within the Trinity; the subjects of these strands are the Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Many who have thought about the Trinity would welcome a conclusion such as this. But then we are brought up short by the initial claim made in the last quotation: *the Persons are persons of whatever sort God is*. This doesn't seem to be right: each of the Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has his own strand of conscious experiences distinct from and with no internal access to the strand of each of the others. But God, on this account "has" *all three* strands of experience, *even though* the strands are discrete and without internal access to each other. And God definitely does not have any *additional* experiences in which he is somehow simultaneously aware of all three strands at once. (Remember that "every event in God's life is part of the Father-Son-Spirit chorus line; God does not live save as Father, Son and Spirit.") But now it looks as though the personhood attributed to God is of a *very* peculiar sort; God appears to be what could perhaps best be described as a "composite person." The "personal life" of a being who has three separate strands of experience at once, and no over-arching consciousness that combines the three, is something we ordinarily have no experience of whatsoever, nor would most of us desire to have such an experience. (The very idea is suggestive of some of the more sinister forms of mental illness.) By contrast, the sort of conscious life attributed to Father, Son, and Spirit individually seems comparatively easy to comprehend—though of course a great deal would need to be said about the enormous differences between God's life and our own. But the claim that "God," as so depicted with multiple life-strands, is *the same sort of person* as Father, Son, and Spirit seems very obviously mistaken.

In fact, however, the understanding of Leftovian Trinitarianism sketched out in the last paragraph is itself mistaken. The mistake comes from failing to take seriously enough Leftow's assertion that "the Persons just *are* God"—that is, are identical with God. It simply *is not the case*, on this account, that there are three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of whom is the subject of one of the three "strands" in the divine life. Rather, there is just *God*, who *as* Father thinks one series of thoughts, *as* Son thinks another series of thoughts, and *as* Spirit thinks yet a third series of thoughts. There are three "strands of divine life" but just *one* person who is living all three of these strands, namely God. The three Trinitarian Persons, then, are God-*as*-Father, God-*as*-Son, and God-*as*-Holy Spirit. To repeat—and this is a point Leftow hammers home time after time—there is just *one* being involved, namely God.

Now that we have all this before us, it seems that Leftow's view presents an intriguing combination of elements from both Social Trinitarianism and modalism. He has affirmed that, in the one life of God, there are three distinct strands of conscious experience, associated with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Social Trinitarians will warmly applaud this result, and will be most interested in seeing how Leftow has arrived at it and justified its possibility. If this much is granted, it may well be that the greatest obstacle to a coherent and satisfying Social doctrine of the Trinity has been overcome. (That this is so would of course need to be argued in detail, which can't be done here.) But then he adds to this that there is really only

one subject of this threefold life, namely the very strange person we know as "God." It would certainly seem that this is a form of modalism; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each different *personae*—different "personations," we might say—in which the one person who is God lives his life. To be sure, the distinction of the "modes" is unusually rich in this case; most classical forms of modalism would not have postulated three wholly discrete streams of experience to correspond to the different modes. But each of the Persons "*just is*" God; there is just this one being experiencing in these different strands.

Social Trinitarians will undoubtedly feel that the assertion that each of the three Persons is identical with the one person who is God undermines much of the promise that seemed to emerge from the recognition of three discrete strands of divine experience. In commenting on the Rockettes case, Leftow points out that something like personal relationships might be possible among the Rockettes, even if each of them is in fact Jane. She "has genuine interpersonal relations with herself in her other roles. She leans on herself for support, smiles to herself, talks (and talks back) to herself. The talk may even be dialogue in the fullest sense. In changing makeup, wig, etc., Jane might well forget what she said when she was leftmost in the line, and so a remark she hears when she is one in from the left might well surprise her, and prompt a response she did not anticipate" (p. 308). (He observes, however, that it is difficult to see how one Trinitarian Person could surprise another.) All well and good, to be sure; clearly the possibility of personal relationships between the Trinitarian Persons is one of the main advantages claimed for Social Trinitarianism. But there seems to be something lacking in Jane's case. Suppose, for instance, that the rightmost Rockette, as she is leaving the stage, trips over a bouquet that has been carelessly tossed onto the stage by an admirer; falling, she suffers a nasty bruise. Without doubt, the other Rockettes (at least the ones nearby when she falls) will be full of sympathy at this untoward occurrence. They will gather around her, gently help her to her feet and back to the dressing room, say comforting things to her, summon medical help if needed, and so on. After all, each of them knows that it is *she herself* who has fallen; even if she isn't suffering the pain at that very moment, she soon enough will be. (But won't she be able to avoid the bouquet, now that she knows it is there? No, she won't, but I'll leave it to the friends of time travel to explain why not.) Still, there seems to be something qualitatively different between sympathizing *with oneself*, even with oneself during a different life-segment or in a different life-strand, and sympathizing with another person. The idea that the Persons of the Trinity love and commune with each other loses much of its appeal if it is all just a matter of the one person, namely God, loving and communing with himself. I suppose someone could argue that judgments such as this one are misplaced—that even if they do hold where human relationships are concerned, they are inappropriate and incorrect when applied to the divine Persons. I have no doubt, though, that most Social Trinitarians will respond with disappointment to this "self-relationship" model. To be sure, the inherent attractiveness of the idea of love and communion between the Trinitarian Persons is not by itself a sufficient grounding for a Social doctrine of the Trinity. But once one has done the hard conceptual work needed to secure the

existence of three distinct strands of divine conscious experience, it seems a shame to spoil the effect by insisting that the relationships involved are all the relations of a single person to himself.

At this point, however, we need to consider Leftow's response to the One Person Argument. His attitude towards the argument, and the parallel One Rockette Argument, is complex and potentially confusing. On the one hand (as we've already noted), he says several times that the argument is sound, but irrelevant; it does no damage to his position. But he also spends a considerable amount of time in discussing alternative readings of the argument and contending that these alternative versions are *not* sound. The key to the different readings is the interpretation of the logical symbol '=' as it occurs in the arguments. On what I shall term the "standard reading" of the arguments, '=' is interpreted to mean strict identity; it is governed by Leibniz' Law, sometimes known as the "indiscernibility of identicals," which states that, if x is identical with y, then anything true of x is true of y, and vice versa. This is the relation that is commonly represented by '=', and logicians would normally understand it this way unless something in the context clearly indicates otherwise. On the alternative readings proposed by Leftow, however, '=' is taken to represent relations other than strict identity, one candidate being temporary identity. *Only the standard reading of the arguments plays a role in the present discussion.* If Leftow proves to be right in his claim that the arguments so understood, even if sound, pose no threat to his position, I shall make no further attempt to raise difficulties based on the alternative readings. If on the other hand the standard reading is *not* innocuous (as I believe to be the case), that will provide quite enough to occupy us without considering the alternative readings.

So why is it that the One Rockette Argument "appears sound, but doesn't shorten the chorus line"? (I take this to mean that the argument's soundness is consistent with the line's being the way it is.) Leftow goes on to explain: "(1a)–(4a) did not shorten the chorus line because the real force of (4a) is

4a*. the substance who is the leftmost Rockette = the substance who is the rightmost Rockette." (p. 316)

Here, however, Leftow seems to be just mistaken. What is entailed by (1a)–(3a) is not (4a*), but simply

4a. the leftmost Rockette = the rightmost Rockette.

And (4a) is not obscure or ambiguous; it is plainly and simply false. We know perfectly well how to count dancers,¹² and during the performance

¹²In saying this I assume, as we all do, that one counts dancers by counting the human bodies performing on stage. Each Rockette is a dancer, and there are exactly as many dancers as there are Rockettes. To count dancers in some other way leads easily to bizarre results. If Jane were suffering (God forbid!) from multiple personality disorder, would Leftow want us to conclude that there are two, three, or more times as many dancers as there are bodies? Or take an analogous situa-

there is not one dancer on the stage (as [4a] implies)¹³, but many. So since (1a) and (2a), together with the unchallengeable (3a), jointly entail (4a), they can't both be true; it's as simple as that.

But what about Leftow's (4a*)? His thought here is that each of these dancers is Jane, so there is just one substance on the stage, namely Jane. But this can't be right either. For all of these dancers to be Jane, she would have to be a scattered object, comprising many different human bodies and weighing something over a ton. But of course, Jane is nothing like that. And on the other hand, there can't be *many* Janes on the stage, because Jane is just one woman. I believe, in fact, that Leftow has not given us a satisfactory answer to his own question, "Many what?" concerning the multiple items on stage. It's quite true that there are many "segments or episodes of Jane's life-events" going on, but segments and episodes don't dance; people do. The only person involved is Jane, but there is only one of her, and she is *not* a large scattered object.

Leftow, however, thinks differently. He goes on to say, "To eliminate Rockettes, one would have to infer from (1a)–(3a) not (4a) or (4a*), but that the episode of Jane's life in which she is the leftmost Rockette and has not previously been any other Rockette is the last episode on her timeline in which she is any Rockette. It's obvious that (1a)–(3a) cannot by themselves yield this conclusion" (p. 316). *That* may be true,¹⁴ but why suppose that this is the only way the One Rockette Argument can cause trouble? To repeat, (4a) by itself entails that there is only one dancer on the stage, and that is just plain false. To make progress, it will be necessary to reject the premises of the One Rockette Argument—something Leftow seems unwilling to do.

And now, what about the One Person Argument? Leftow actually says comparatively little about this argument; he relies on the conclusions he has reached concerning the One Rockette Argument to transfer and to guarantee that the One Person Argument is innocuous. Presumably, then, he wants us to conclude that the "real force" of (4) is captured by

4*. the substance who is the Father = the substance who is the Son,

the substance in question being simply God. Once again, however, we must object: what (1)–(3) entail is not (4*), but simply

tion: The Oxford rugby team has just scored a crucial try, but the play is called back and a penalty awarded to Cambridge because Oxford had too many players on the pitch. Leftow, however, succeeds in getting the decision reversed and the try reinstated: he points out that two of the Oxford players were on the field "twice over" as a result of their having gone through the Wells-o-matic; thus there were in reality only fifteen players on the pitch and not seventeen as erroneously supposed by the match officials.

¹³In a left-to-right chorus line, the only way the leftmost and rightmost members can be identical is if the "line" contains only one dancer.

¹⁴This isn't entirely clear, however. As I've pointed out, (4a) does imply that there is only one Rockette on the stage, so when she leaves the stage after being the leftmost Rockette there isn't any other Rockette for her to be—at least during this performance.

4. the Father = the Son.

And that is something we can't swallow, not at least if we want to be orthodox Trinitarians. But Leftow makes yet another move in response to the One Person Argument. He says, "(1)–(3) do not license the conclusion that the events (life) in which God is Father are the only events (life) in which He is any Person" (p. 316). To which we may reply, No, they don't license *that* conclusion—but why should we suppose that this renders the argument innocuous? There is still the identity statement, "the Father = the Son" to contend with, and so long as that statement follows from (1)–(3)—*which it surely does*—the argument has by no means lost its power to undermine a claim to Trinitarian orthodoxy.

I will now propose a modification of Leftovian Trinitarianism, one that will overcome some of the difficulties that have been noted. I think this modification is in the spirit of Leftow's project, and it is possible that he might be willing to accept it. In any case, it should help us to see that the prospects for LEFT as a version of orthodox Trinitarianism are brighter than they have appeared up until now. The most urgent problem is that of avoiding the conclusion of the One Person Argument,

4. the Father = the Son,

as well as the corresponding conclusion concerning the Rockettes,

4a. the leftmost Rockette = the rightmost Rockette.

Leftow seems to think these conclusions are innocuous, but we have seen that he is mistaken about that. The problems are real, and cannot be avoided so long as we assume a relation of identity to hold between Jane and the leftmost Rockette, and between God and the Father. So long as these assumptions are maintained, the entailments of (4) and (4a) will go through.

What we need, then, is some way to understand "the leftmost Rockette is Jane," and "the Father is God," that does not posit strict identity between the items in question. A place to begin is by answering Leftow's question, "Many what?" concerning the items on the stage—a question that I've argued Leftow himself has not answered satisfactorily. One candidate is to say that each Rockette is a *temporal part* of Jane. But Leftow is no friend of temporal parts, so if possible we should avoid that notion in explicating his theory. My suggestion is that what we have on stage is many instances of "Jane-during-the-interval- t_n -to- t_{n+m} ." There are, however, a couple of points concerning this formula that need to be clarified. First, the intervals in question need to be measured along Jane's personal timeline, rather than along our common timeline. In our timeline all of the intervals coincide, but in Jane's timeline they will be discrete. But second, the hyphens connecting the words in the formula are essential. The referent of "Jane during the interval t_n to t_{n+m} " is simply Jane; the expression specifying the interval will then modify whatever Jane is said to be doing—for instance, playing the role of the leftmost Rockette. So if the Rockette were identical with "Jane during the interval t_n to t_{n+m} ," this would amount simply to the Rockette being identical with Jane, and we are back to the One Rockette

Argument. “Jane-during-the-interval- t_n -to- t_{n+m} ” on the other hand, exists *only* during the specified interval; the expression refers to nothing at all that exists either before t_n or after t_{n+m} .¹⁵

With this move in hand, I submit that we have a way of understanding “Jane is the leftmost Rockette” that does not postulate identity between the Rockette and Jane, and that will avoid the pitfall of the One Rockette Argument. The Rockette is indeed identical with (let’s say) Jane-during-the-interval- t_1 -to- t_4 . But that doesn’t mean she is identical with Jane *simpliciter*; Jane *simpliciter* is distinct from Jane-during-the-interval- t_1 -to- t_4 , as is shown by the different periods of time during which each endures. Jane’s life lasts for a good number of years—twenty-some already, but also, one hopes, for many more in the future—whereas Jane-during-the-interval- t_1 -to- t_4 lasts for only a little longer than the dance performance. So we don’t have

1a. the leftmost Rockette = Jane,

and the One Rockette Argument doesn’t get off the ground.¹⁶

A similar move will enable us to understand “the Father is God” in a way that steers clear of the One Person Argument. The Father, we will say, is identical with God-living-the-Father-life-stream, and so also with the Son and the Spirit. (As in the case of Jane, the hyphens are essential.) However, God-living-the-Father-life-stream is not identical with God *simpliciter*; the latter, but not the former, lives the Son-life-stream and the Spirit-life-stream as well as the Father-life-stream. So we do not get

1. the Father = God

as a consequence, and the One Person Argument doesn’t get off the ground.

All this leads us to conclude that Leftovian Trinitarianism thus modified is not formally heretical, as the unmodified version appeared to be from our earlier considerations. That is not to say, however, that all of the objections to the view have been avoided. There is, for instance, the very peculiar character of the personhood of God, as a being who simultaneously enjoys three discreet, and mutually inaccessible, life-streams of experience. Still,

¹⁵It has been suggested by one referee and also by the editor that my formula does amount after all to saying that what is on stage are various temporal parts of Jane. If so, this is not a serious problem for me; it would mean only that I was unsuccessful in my attempt to defer to Leftow’s aversion to temporal parts. But it is not clear to me that I must appeal to temporal parts. I should say that Jane-during-a-certain-segment-of-her-lifespan is fully present at each moment of that interval, just as Jane *simpliciter* is fully present at each moment of her life.

¹⁶On pp. 324–326, Leftow proposes a move that is somewhat similar to this. His move, however, employs temporary identities, and what it shows (if successful) is that an analogue of the One Person Argument employing temporary identities is unsound. He never retracts his admission that the One Person Argument is sound on the standard reading, understanding ‘=’ as strict identity. And given the assumptions of LEFT, it is indeed sound, but it is very far from harmless. The interpretation involving temporary identities is further developed by Leftow in his later paper, “Modes Without Modalism.”

this may not be viewed as an overly serious problem; the Trinitarian nature of God, it may be said, should be expected to be mysterious and even peculiar. More serious, at least in the eyes of some, is the aroma of modalism that still hangs around the proposal.¹⁷ Earlier we noted Leftow's assertion that

Just as Jane can token with truth "I am the leftmost Rockette" and "I am the rightmost," God can token with truth "I am the Father" and "I am the Son." But just as Jane cannot token both claims with truth at the same points in her life, God cannot token with truth "I am the Son" at points in His life at which He is Father. (p. 315)

But here a distinction seems to be called for. When Jane is at the left end of the line, she cannot truthfully say, "I am the rightmost Rockette," if she means by that, "I am now (in this segment of my personal timeline) performing the role of the rightmost Rockette." She can, however, state in perfect truthfulness, "I am the person who now (in the public timeline) is performing the role of the rightmost Rockette." Similarly, God as Father cannot truthfully say, "I am the Son," if he means by that, "I am now (in this life-stream) experiencing the Son-life-stream." He can, however, say truthfully that "I am the person [not, the Trinitarian Person] who experiences the Son-life-stream." He cannot say, "I, the Father, suffered and died on the cross." But he can say, "I am the person who, as the Son, suffered and died on the cross." The difference between the Persons is a good deal less pronounced than many have supposed it to be. In the Gospels, we have the spectacle of God-as-Son *praying to himself*, namely to God-as-Father. Perhaps most poignant of all (and this should be no surprise) are the words of abandonment on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" On the view we are considering, this comes out as "Why have I-as-Father forsaken myself-as-Son?" To some of us, this just doesn't seem to be what the Gospels are saying.

If these objections strike you as formidable, then you will not find LEFT to present an attractive or plausible account of the Trinity. Unlike the One Person Argument, the objections sketched above can't be avoided by any minor modification; they are integral to Leftovian Trinitarianism. So we can close with a remark that parallel's Leftow's own comment: if Leftovian Trinitarianism's prospects do not look good, the moral one ought to draw is that it is time to reconsider Social Trinitarianism.¹⁸

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¹⁷In the final section of "A Latin Trinity," entitled "The Menace of Modalism," Leftow defends LEFT from the charge that it is a version of modalism. He cites several definitions of modalism from theological dictionaries, and insists that on these definitions, LEFT doesn't qualify. I don't disagree with this; modalism is standardly considered a heresy, and I have not claimed that LEFT (once it has been modified to avoid the One Person Argument) is heretical. I do think, however, that it has a modalist "flavor or aroma," and in support I adduce the points made in the text. Readers are invited to consider for themselves whether this "flavor" renders the view less plausible and attractive.

¹⁸My thanks to the editor and to two unnamed referees for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.