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TIME TRAVEL AND THE TRINITY

Brian Leftow

I have used a time travel story to model the “Latin” version of the Trinity. William Hasker’s “A Leftovian Trinity?” criticizes my arguments. This piece replies.

I have used a time travel story to model what I call the Latin approach to the doctrine of the Trinity.¹ Suppose that one Rockette used a time machine to do all the dancing of an entire chorus line: she dances on the extreme left, runs offstage to the machine, goes back in time, joins herself as the dancer next in from the left, etc. Were this to occur, the audience would see many episodes of her life at once: episodes at distinct times along her personal timeline would occur at once in public time. The Trinity, I’ve suggested, may involve something broadly similar. As causal relations among her life’s episodes are such that one Rockette, Jane, dances many times at once, so perhaps causal relations among episodes in God’s life are such that God always lives three episodes of His life at any one public time, one as Father, one as Son, and one as Spirit. William Hasker’s “A Leftovian Trinity?”—that is a surreally ugly adjective—critiques my proposal.² I now reply.

How Many Dancers?

I consider this argument about my chorus line:

- 1a. the leftmost Rockette = Jane.
- 2a. the rightmost Rockette = Jane.
- 3a. Jane = Jane. So,
- 4a. the leftmost Rockette = the rightmost Rockette.³

Hasker notes that I call this argument on one reading sound—and irrelevant to the length of the chorus line.⁴ He disagrees about the relevance.⁵ On the sound-making reading of the argument, the descriptions are

¹“A Latin Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004), 304–333.

²*Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009), 154–166.

³“A Latin Trinity,” 307. I preserve the numbering of the original article.

⁴“A Leftovian Trinity?,” 162; cf. “A Latin Trinity,” 317.

⁵“A Leftovian Trinity?,” 162–164.



temporally rigid.⁶ Their sense plus context of use fix their reference to Jane, but once it is fixed, they pick out Jane at all times, even when she does not satisfy them: with “the leftmost Rockette” so taken, (1a) is true of Jane throughout her life. To highlight this feature, I wrote that (4a)’s real force is

4a*. the substance who is the leftmost Rockette = the substance who is the rightmost Rockette.⁷

My thought was that making the description temporally rigid “pins” it on the substance, Jane, regardless of whether she is then dancing in the leftmost spot.

I took the argument to be irrelevant because it does not shorten the chorus line, i.e., imply that we are not seeing many dancings of one person at once. One way to see this is just that it does yield a conclusion about *Jane*. To shorten the chorus line, it would have to yield a conclusion about episodes of her life, namely, that the episode in which she danced in the leftmost position is the same episode in her personal timeline as that in which she danced in the rightmost position. Given time travel, this is false even though the substance dancing leftmost = the substance dancing rightmost. In public time, the episodes are simultaneous: while Jane is dancing at the left, she is dancing at the right. But in time travel stories, episodes of one and the same life stand in two sorts of ordering-relations, those of the public and those of personal timelines. And my story bases the difference between Persons on something like God’s personal timeline.

Again, like (1a), (2a) with the description rigid and (3a) are true of Jane throughout her life. So what they entail, (4a), is true of Jane in every episode of her life. So all we can infer from (4a) are claims that apply to Jane equally in every episode of her life. To shorten the chorus line, the argument would have to yield a claim that does not apply to Jane in every episode of her life, namely, that she is dancing in both the leftmost and the rightmost spot. Again, reading “the leftmost Rockette” rigidly, Jane is the leftmost Rockette just in case she ever dances in the leftmost spot, and so too for the rightmost.⁸ So (4a) would be true had she had danced leftmost on January 1, 2002 and rightmost on December 20, 2009. Its being true under these circumstances would have no implications about the length of the chorus line on either date. So its being true with the descriptions read rigidly is not relevant to the length of any other chorus line Jane ever danced in—including one in which she time travels and so is the sole dancer in an extended line. Further, if this is correct and if Jane would have danced leftmost in

⁶“A Latin Trinity,” 317.

⁷Ibid., 316.

⁸This claim is true only if what the proposition “Jane = the leftmost Rockette” expresses isn’t that Jane = the leftmost Rockette at *t*. I take “=” to express a present-tensed “is identical with.” So taken, “Jane = the leftmost Rockette” doesn’t express that.

some chorus line even if she had not time traveled and would have danced rightmost in some chorus line even if she had not time traveled, (4a) would be true even if she had not time traveled. This is another reason to say that its truth is irrelevant to what we should say about features of her life only time travel could induce. So on the reading on which I concede that this argument is sound, (4a) does not shorten the chorus line, because it does not entail that we do not see many dancer-roles (leftmost, rightmost, etc.) being filled at one point in public time, or many discrete episodes in the life of a dancer, or many dancings. That there is one dancer—one dancing substance—in the chorus line is irrelevant to these things, given time travel.

Moreover, the argument doesn't even give reason to think the chorus line is not extended with the descriptions read non-rigidly. Temporally non-rigid descriptions refer only to what satisfies their senses, while it satisfies their senses. With the descriptions so read, Jane = the leftmost Rockette only while she is dancing leftmost. When she ceases, either someone else is identical with the leftmost Rockette or no-one is identical with the leftmost Rockette. So in the context of a time travel story and with the descriptions non-rigid, (1a)–(3a) should be read this way: at one point in Jane's life (1a) is true, and at a later point (2a) is true. To identify Jane as leftmost and Jane as rightmost, then, (3a) must identify Jane at one point in her life with Jane at another. It must act as a *diachronic* identity. But a diachronic identity is the wrong sort to shorten the chorus line in the context of a time travel story. For the story *assumes*, as part of what lies behind the line's being extended, that the person who reappears in it is the same person over the course of many appearances. If a diachronic identity shortened the chorus line, it would collapse episodes in Jane's life (ordered along her personal timeline) into a single episode. If diachronic identities did that, a temporally extended life would be impossible. Again, if the fact that Jane = Jane suffices to shorten the line to one, this bare truism is enough to show that time travel is impossible. Philosophy is full of surprises, but somehow the truism just doesn't seem relevant to whether anyone can travel in time.

Hasker thinks the argument is relevant even if it doesn't shorten the chorus line because

(1a)–(3a) [entail] not (4a*), but . . . (4a). . . . And (4a) is . . . false. . . . [D]uring the performance there is not one dancer onstage (as [4a] implies), but many. So since (1a) and (2a) . . . with (3a) jointly entail (4a), they can't both be true.⁹

Hasker does not say how (1a) or (2a) manage to be false. For convenience, let's only for the rest of this paragraph suppose that "(4a)" and "(4a*)" name sentences, not propositions. Then given my distinction between temporally rigid and non-rigid descriptions, (4a) can express at least four different propositions. Hasker does not say which one(s) he thinks to

⁹"A Leftovian Trinity?," 162–163.

follow. (4a*) tries to say more clearly what (4a) says when what it says validly follows from (1a)–(3a) read with temporally rigid descriptions.

Hasker thinks (4a) implies that there is just one dancer on stage. On one way of counting dancers—we see shortly that there is another—I agree that there is just one. But the line has its length due to time travel (says the story, which Hasker says he is granting me).¹⁰ The time travel which makes the line extended is compatible with there being just one dancer present (on one way of counting dancers). For it is just one dancer who travels through time, and time travel is what generates the manyness in the chorus line. Let's now ask why Hasker thinks there isn't just one dancer there. He writes,

We . . . count dancers . . . by counting human bodies performing on stage. Each Rockette is a dancer, and there are exactly as many dancers as . . . Rockettes. To count dancers in some other way leads easily to bizarre results. [Suppose] the Oxford rugby team has just scored . . . but the play is called back . . . because Oxford had too many players on the pitch. [Counting in some other way, one could get] the decision reversed [by pointing] out that two of the Oxford players were on the field 'twice over' as a result of their having gone through the [time machine]; thus there were in reality only fifteen players on the pitch and not seventeen as erroneously supposed by the match officials.¹¹

Here Hasker miscounts the dancers' bodies. In the time travel story, there is just the one. If time travel occurred, we would have to look into the history of what we see on stage before hazarding number-claims. Yes, each Rockette is a dancer—but in the story there is just the one Rockette. To say that there are many bodies or Rockettes on stage is just to tell some other story in place of the time travel story we should be discussing.

There is in any case more than one way to count dancers. One can count by bodies. One can also count by roles played. If Jane did a ballet solo dressed as an elf, then later Mary did the same solo, it would make sense to say, "I saw one dancer, an elf, twice." In speaking so, we would note that the elf-role was played twice, and count dancers as distinct only if they play different roles. We would abstract from the identities of the bodies involved and of Jane and Mary. We would count dancers as the story of the ballet may count them. So too, if Jane did an elf solo then returned later to solo dressed as a clown, it would make sense to say "there were two dancers, an elf and a clown," though there was only one body, and in another sense, one dancer. If some sharpie tried to get around the referees as Hasker describes, an official who'd thought about counting could reply "in *this* game we count by roles; a side has the right number of players just in case fifteen player roles are filled. So it doesn't matter that there were only fifteen bodies there. The fifteen bodies were playing seventeen roles, and so the penalty stands." There are many Rockettes counting

¹⁰Ibid., 158.

¹¹Ibid., 162, 162 n12.

by roles, but not counting by bodies or people who play the roles. So too, there are many Trinitarian subjects of experience counting by roles played, but not by Gods who play the roles.¹² This is not to say that the roles make the Persons distinct, let alone (as on classical modalism) that God plays any of them only temporarily. It is only to say that Persons and roles pair 1:1, so that by counting the one, we can count the other.

Hasker also denies that there is just the one substance, Jane, onstage, because

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 . . . there can't be *many* Janes on the stage, because Jane is just one woman. . . . Leftow has not given us a satisfactory answer to his own question, "Many what?," concerning the multiple items on stage.¹³

Here Hasker again refuses to play along with the time travel story. If Jane travels through time, there aren't many different bodies onstage. There is only Jane's body. Again, consider me at one-hour intervals along my own personal timeline: from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. I weigh n , from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. I weigh n , etc. We would not infer from this that over the course of a day my weight is $24n$. Hasker does infer this for Jane. She is onstage at many points along her personal timeline: counting her weight many times then is just the same as counting mine twenty-four times over in a day. The stage *is* groaning under a ton of weight. But what generates that ton of stress is an object which at no point along its personal timeline weighs a ton. And even in public time, it does not weigh a ton, for what it weighs is just what it weighs at each place onstage at which Jane dances, not what is weighed over the whole of the stage. Nor is Jane ever a scattered object along her own timeline. Scattered objects have proper parts in spatially discrete places at the same time on their own timelines. All of Jane at any point along her personal timeline is in one continuous place. Nor is Jane a scattered object along our public timeline. Each dancer can say truly, "I am Jane." So none is just a proper part of Jane, nor does Jane consist of many Janes.

There is one Jane. We see many episodes of her life at once. What are there many of? I had written, "Jane . . . plays many different . . . roles. [There is] one Jane in many *personae*."¹⁴ We get many dancers counting by roles. So there are many dancers-playing-roles, playings of roles, events. Hasker is not happy with this. He wants an answer to "many what?" in the category of substance, because there are (as he counts) many dancers,

¹²Playing different roles does not multiply the substances playing them, so however many roles God plays, there is just the one God. And though there is the one God, this has no implications for how many lives (parts of His life) He lives at once, and so there being the one God does not on my view imply that there is just one Person—a Person is God living a particular part of His life.

¹³"A Leftovian Trinity?," 163.

¹⁴"A Latin Trinity," 308.

and events don't dance.¹⁵ Since there is no good reason to say that there *are* many dancers (counting by bodies, as Hasker does) if one stays within the time travel story, and Hasker at least *says* that he's granting me that story, I needn't give the sort of answer he wants. But I will, as it does seem that as we watch the chorus lines, we see many things kicking, not just many kicks. There aren't many Janes. There *are* Jane earlier, Jane later, Jane still later . . . and Jane earlier is just Jane, diachronically identical with Jane later.¹⁶ We do not ordinarily think of Jane earlier and Jane later as things we might line up and count. If time travel started happening, the needed conceptual reform might be to start to think this way. Jane earlier is not a different person than Jane later, but just Jane again: if time travel started to occur, we might need to make conceptual space to just let the concept of Jane earlier stand, and talk about Jane again, and say that we see Jane as many times as we see dancings in the chorus line: this would just recognize what we find ourselves faced with. The parallel claim about the Persons is that they are God, God, and God again, concurrently. This has a nice ring to it: the Word was with God, the Word was God, and so God was with God, concurrently.

The Trinitarian Application

I took up (1a)–(4a) to set up discussion of

1. the Father = God,
2. the Son = God,
3. God = God, so
4. the Father = the Son.

I cannot treat (1)–(4) without rehashing too much of the original piece; I will say only that I gave reasons to consider (1)–(4) both invalid and unsound. Hasker seems to think that these do not apply to (1)–(4) read as involving ordinary strict identity: he writes that the “=” in these “is taken to represent relations other than strict identity, one candidate being temporary identity.”¹⁷ But while I do discuss identities that hold temporarily, an identity can be both temporary and of the ordinary strict Leibnizian sort. Let “Chair” name my chair. Then that Chair = Chair is as strict an identity as any other. But if Chair = Chair, something is identical with

¹⁵“A Leftovian Trinity?,” 163.

¹⁶Michael Rea suggests that Jane is not strictly identical with each Rockette (Michael Rea, “The Trinity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 412). I can't see why; teenaged Leftow is strictly identical with middle-aged Leftow, and both with Leftow. And teen- and middle-aged Leftow are certainly “consubstantial” (ibid.) if they are the same substance at different points in its life. It's not (for me) that God “exists in” (ibid.) the event-based Persons. The Persons are identical with God. They are distinct from one another only in that they are God at different points in His life (lives)—as with teen- and middle-aged me. That is the sense in which their identity and distinctness is event-based.

¹⁷“A Leftovian Trinity?,” 162

Chair. So if nothing is identical with Chair—i.e., when Chair does not exist—it is not true that Chair = Chair. Before Chair's manufacture, it was not true that Chair = Chair. When Chair collapses next year, there will no longer be anything identical with Chair, and so it will no longer be true that Chair = Chair. So that Chair = Chair is a temporary identity, but perfectly ordinary: reflexive, symmetric, transitive and obedient to Leibniz's Law. It's not clear to me that anything I say about (1a)–(4a) or (1)–(4) involves something other than strict identity, though much of it discusses identities true only at some times. Of course, if it is temporarily true that Chair = Chair, this is also contingently true. But though it is contingent that anything is identical with Chair, Chair is essentially identical with Chair. Chair can't exist without being Chair, and necessarily, if something is identical with Chair, Chair is identical with Chair. This is just the "weak necessity" common since Kripke in expressing essentialist claims. So "Chair = Chair" can express something necessary even if it is a temporary identity: weak necessity is compatible with strong contingency (failure to be true in some possible worlds).

Returning to the main thread, as Hasker thought most of my discussion was irrelevant to (1)–(4) read with the "=" of strict identity, he does not talk about most of what I say about (1)–(4). His objections to my treatment of (1)–(4) just are (strict parallels to) his objections to my treatment of (1a)–(4a). So if I have dealt with the latter satisfactorily, my treatment of (1)–(4) stands.

The Persons

Hasker writes that for me,

God as Father cannot truthfully say "I am the Son," [but] can . . . say truthfully that I am the person (not, the Trinitarian Person) who experiences the Son-life-stream . . . I am the person who, as the Son, suffered . . . on the cross." The difference between the Persons is . . . less pronounced than many [suppose].¹⁸

On my view, the difference between Persons is not like that between three dons sitting around in a Common Room (as someone once caricatured David Brown's version of the social Trinity) but like that between myself at twenty, myself at thirty and myself at forty: again, all are God, but at different points in His life (lives). If at twenty I could attach a special twenty-year-old sense to "I," I could still refer to myself and note that I am the person who will be thirty. So of course, on my view, God can say what Hasker puts in His mouth. This is not just a feature of my particular view. It will be so for any Trinitarian who allows that the God the Persons are is a self (a referent for "I") and can use "I" literally to refer to Himself: which is to say, anyone who approaches the Trinity broadly as did such Latin writers as Augustine and Aquinas.

¹⁸"A Leftovian Trinity?," 166.

Elsewhere Hasker suggests that we see God as one “soul” with three “subjects of experience,” the Persons.¹⁹ This soul considered in itself, apart from the subjects, either is or is not the sort of thing that can refer to itself with “I.” If it is not, the soul is sub-personal and as such is not a perfect being, though it somehow supports perfect beings. It is uncomfortable at best to find an imperfect being in the Godhead. Suppose then that it is. Then we must ask just how it does so. If it can refer to itself by “I” with no involvement by Father, Son or Spirit, it is a fourth Person, which is heretical. If it cannot, but can refer to itself by “I,” it does so with the involvement of some Person(s). The clearest model of this would be that it says “I” through some Person(s) saying “I,” i.e., that when (say) the Father refers to Himself as “I,” the soul thereby also refers to itself as “I.” But there would be no reason for just one Person to (as it were) speak for the soul; they all have the same relation to it. So this model leads us naturally to the claim that the soul refers to itself by “I” when any Person does so. Yet if this is so, the soul seems to be a fourth self: no Person can say “I” through the other three, so it can’t be identical with any Person, and yet it is something that can say “I” of itself, albeit through the Persons’ doing so. Again, this is heretical.

Further, a question arises about whether without any involvement of a Person the divine soul has experiences. If it does not, then considered in itself it is not just sub-personal but sub-sentient. What is a non-sentient concrete thing doing in God? If it does, either it has some experience strictly of its own, not shared with any Person, or it has all and only the Persons’ experiences. But even if we try to say the latter, it turns out that it has some strictly of its own. Each Person has only His own experiences. The Father experiences reality *as Father*; though He has full third-person access to the other Persons’ experiences, He has first-person access only to His own, and though He experiences the Son’s experiences, He has them as the Father experiencing another Person’s experiences, not as the Son having His own experiences. But the soul has all three Persons’ experiences. So the soul has a set of experiences no Person has.²⁰ So it is a fourth subject of experience in addition to the Persons—again, heretical.

Suppose on the other hand that somehow the soul has the Persons’ experiences and yet is not a fourth subject. Then it would have those experiences *as* those Persons. So it would be able to use their “I”s; their saying “I” would also be its. If Hasker’s divine soul *is* able to say “I” through the Persons, the soul as Father can truly say “I am the soul who as Son suffered on the cross.” As this may be the best resolution of the problems Hasker’s divine soul causes, it seems that he should wind up saying something very like what he objects to in my view.

¹⁹“Objections to Social Trinitarianism,” *Religious Studies* 46 (2010), 436.

²⁰This point is much indebted to Joseph Jedwab.

Talking to Myself

Hasker also adduces Scriptural texts:

we have the spectacle of God-as-Son praying to Himself, namely to God-as-Father.²¹

God as Son's praying to Himself as Father should not seem odd to us if we can grant the coherence of (some instances of) a particular form of science fiction. Consider a story:

BAMBAMBAM. What? The door. I stride over and open. He's old—50?—bald, graying, visibly agitated. He stares at me a few seconds, then spews. "I know what you're up to. DON'T DO IT. PLEASE. You'll ruin your life. You have no idea—" I close the door quickly. I can see him starting to cry. I guess he left eventually. I told my wife about it that night, then forgot it. As one does. Two months later, it happened. My life as I knew it was over. It took a year to crawl back to some semblance of normalcy. But it was only a semblance. Some days I could go an hour without a knife of regret twisting in my gut, some days not. That's how it was, for years. Then I found the Machine. I worked out how to use it. I knew I'd have just one chance. I set the dials, and—wow! It's New Haven again. There's the old place. I almost run up the stairs. I knock. It opens. Did I ever look that good? I start to speak. He's getting alarmed. As he starts to shut the door I remember—I didn't listen.

Anyone willing to go along with a time travel story will find nothing particularly outré in a story of one person at one point in his life begging the same person at another point. If this is not particularly odd within a time travel case, it is not particularly odd in the case of a God whose life has a structural similarity to a time traveler's life.

Again, Hasker asks us to consider the words

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" On [Leftow's view] . . . this comes out as "Why have I-as-Father forsaken myself-as-Son?" . . . [T]his just doesn't seem to be what the Gospels are saying.²²

Only if the Son had sufficient access to His knowledge of His relation to the Father while on earth is this a reasonable construal of what He meant to say—and if He did not mean to say it, it is not a reasonable construal of what He said. If the Son on earth had full access to what He knew about the Father, He could not find anything the Father did surprising, or wonder about its reasons, or have it seem to Him that He had been deserted, for as omniscient, the Son knew *everything* the Father was up to, and why—even the Father's inmost thoughts. So the text Hasker cites suggests that the Son did not have full access to what He knew about the Father. If so, the only questions are just how much access He had, and to what.

²¹"A Leftovian Trinity?," 166.

²²Ibid.

The Gospels do not make this clear (to understate). Fairly kenotic views of this can claim not to run foul of the New Testament. So some agnosticism is in order when we consider whether or to what extent the Son had any inkling of the Father's true relation to Him during His earthly ministry, and we should doubt that anything God the Son had cognitive access to on earth would have made it odd for Him to feel deserted by the Father. As He had no false beliefs, He did not believe that He was not the same God as the Father, or that it was not the case that if the Father deserted Him, one God deserted Himself. But He may not have had conscious access to the beliefs that He was the same God or that if the Father deserted Him, one God deserted Himself, and could have had a mental life which proceeded as nearly as could be as if He did not believe these things.

So too, we should doubt that the Son had access to anything that would make praying to the Father seem odd to Him. There is something a bit unsettling about the bare notion of a divine, perfect, unsurpassed being praying to *anything*. But if we bracket that, if God the Son did not have full access to the facts about His relation to God the Father, He would not have understood Himself to be praying "why have I forsaken myself?" and so would not have been doing so. He would have been using the Son's "myself" and "I," which, as I've written elsewhere, pick out only the Son.

It should not seem odd to us that someone should feel that he had forsaken himself if he was not aware that it was he himself who (he felt) was doing the forsaking. *Modulo* a time travel story, we can easily imagine that I at seventy time travel back to 2011, befriend BL earlier in disguise, then betray him. Again, consider leftmost Jane: she expects herself in the next position to support her as she kicks, but for some reason later Jane next over suddenly withdraws her arm and lets leftmost Jane smash to the ground. Leftmost would wonder why later Jane had done that. How much would that differ from wondering why another woman had done that, and why should that difference turn the story odd if time travel as such isn't odd? So if Hasker's "this just doesn't seem to be what the Gospels are saying" has the force "this is a metaphysically odd picture, and the Gospels aren't presenting this as metaphysically odd," one answer is that the Gospels just aren't doing the metaphysics of the Trinity, but another is that if we grant the coherence of time travel stories, the only difficulty in the claim that God forsakes Himself is that it suggests a defect of character.

Selfish?

Hasker adds,

The idea that the Persons of the Trinity love and commune with one another loses much of its appeal if it is all just . . . one person, namely God, loving and communing with Himself.²³

²³*Ibid.*, 161.

In the human analogue, one can see why: if Jane sympathizes with the next Jane, selfishness or inappropriate self-concern may explain much of this, spoiling the moral and spiritual value we might otherwise see there, making true un-self-interested self-giving almost impossible. But such motives don't exist in God. Were I a time traveling saint, I might not favor myself over others (or myself earlier) at all, and my loving relations with BL earlier might make a pretty picture. (I would know just how BL earlier would react, if I recalled the reacting, but then God is supposed to foreknow our reactions too, and nonetheless have real, valuable personal relations with us.) Further, even if the Persons are as discrete as ever Hasker might wish, they have precisely the same natures. They have the same perfect rationality, wisdom and goodness. They know all the same things (save where the distinctively Personal "I" figures in their self-knowledge). They fully know one another's inner lives. These things plus the rest of deity leave precious little room for quirky individuality; whatever would dispose the Father to like chocolate better than vanilla would so dispose the Son too, and so the stronger the disposition, the less the chance of a difference of taste. On the standard Latin approach, in fact, the only difference between the Persons consists in their relations of origin: the Son is *exactly* as the Father is, save that the Father is God begetting, the Son God begotten. There can be no question of mutual unfolding of what was unknown, of anything like human dialogue, of the moral value of overcoming differences, etc. Given the ways it is uncontroversial that the Persons are alike, particularly on the Latin approach, how exactly is their loving and communing different from one person's loving and communing with Himself as He is elsewhere in His life, and why should "much" of its value depend on precisely this difference?

An Exegetical Aside

Hasker doubts that I read Aquinas correctly. When I write, "if the Father's deity is God's, this is because the Father *just is* God: which last is what Aquinas wanted to say,"²⁴ he comments,

So 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. . . . Thomas Aquinas would not be high on most people's lists of people who wanted to say things but never quite managed to say them.²⁵

Aquinas would be high on his own list of such people, since he thinks that any who try to talk about God will find themselves in this position quickly. And I did in fact give a quote. Hasker even quotes my quotation of it:

God begotten receives numerically the same nature God begetting has.²⁶

²⁴Quoted at "A Leftovian Trinity?" 156.

²⁵Ibid., 156 n8.

²⁶ST Ia 39, 5 ad 2, my translation, quoted at "A Leftovian Trinity?" 155.

“God begetting” is one of Aquinas’s terms for the Father. God begetting is God, doing something. Thomas had in the previous article affirmed that “*Pater est Deus generans*”—the Father is God generating.”²⁷ God generating is God, who does something. This is the sense in which for Aquinas, the Father just is God—and so too Son and Spirit.²⁸

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²⁷*ST* Ia 39, 4 ad 3.

²⁸My thanks to Joseph Jedwab and the Editor and referees for comments.