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## ON HASKER ON LEFTOW ON HASKER ON LEFTOW

Brian Leftow

William Hasker has rejected my rejection of his criticisms of my “Latin” account of the Trinity. I now reject his rejection.

The Editor has kindly allowed me a brief last (?) reply—but he emphasized “brief,” so I will just plunge in, assuming that you’ve read the earlier parts of this exchange. As Hasker says, we would ordinarily say there are many dancers onstage. But there are at least two ways to count dancers. One simply counts the substances onstage. The other also counts substances, but counts them in terms of the roles they play, so that one substance counts as two dancers if playing two roles. Ordinarily, the dancers would not all be one woman, and so there would be many no matter which way we counted. So ordinarily, we needn’t bear in mind that there is more than one way to count dancers. But a time travel case isn’t ordinary, and given time travel, we must bear this in mind, for if we count by roles there are many dancers, but if we count by substances playing the roles there is just one. Given time travel, the two ways to count yield different results, and so if time travel became common, description of some situations might become more complicated, and we might want more information than we now do if we are to be confident we’re speaking accurately. But both ways of counting are perfectly ordinary; neither “runs counter to our normal ways of using language.” I don’t think there’s anything inadequate about my way of describing the case. The “reform” it involves is just to recognize that in a time travel case one Jane-shaped object’s being Jane does not preclude another’s being Jane.

### *The Trinitarian Application*

I take God’s being triune to consist in His having a life which is in one respect like a time traveler’s: at each instant in public time He is living three distinct segments of His life at once, one as each Person. Each Person is just God, but God at a particular point on His personal timeline—God when He is living as the Father, as the Son, etc. On God’s personal timeline, He is never two Persons at once: no segment of God’s life as Father is also a segment of God’s life as Son, though each segment of God’s life as Father is at a point in public time at which God is also the Son. If asked, the Father would say that He is God, and that the Son is God at a different point in His life, as I might say of myself now and the infant I was that both are me, but at different points in my life. I treat “the Father” as I do “the leftmost Rockette,” as a definite description which may be temporally rigid or non-



rigid. Once we apply a temporally rigid description to an item, it “tags” the item at all times, even times at which it does not satisfy the description: had my father at my birth said “You are The Newborn”—let’s pretend I was the only newborn just then and that he meant this to be temporally rigid—The Newborn would be fifty-six this year. A temporally non-rigid description always picks out whatever happens to satisfy it, if anything does: thus if “The Newborn” was temporally non-rigid, I would have ceased to be The Newborn at once. If “the Father” is temporally rigid, it picks out the God who is the Father, and “follows” Him into points on His personal timeline at which He is not the Father, i.e., into the Son’s life, just as “The Newborn” picked out the human being who was newly born and followed him into times in which he was not newborn. On His personal timeline, when God is the Son, He does not satisfy the description “the Father.” But He is the God who was tagged “the Father” when He did satisfy it. He is the God to whom the description taken rigidly refers even though He does not satisfy the description taken non-rigidly. On my approach, this is all (4) records. Taken as temporally rigid, “the Father” applies to something just if it is the God who in some life has the properties that suffice for being the Father (say, being unbegotten). So it’s fair to take “the God who is in some life unbegotten” to express its sense. If that’s correct, (4) is in effect

4b. the God who is in some life the Father is also the God who is in some life the Son,

or

4c. the God who is in some life unbegotten is also the God who is in some life begotten,

claims compatible with the lives, and so the Persons, remaining distinct (as dancers counted by roles remain distinct even if the same woman dances both roles). This is close to the reading of the argument Hasker gives in his n. 11. Hasker then adds that whether or not (1)–(3) entail (4b), they also entail the heretical (4). My reply is this: propositions the words of the sentences (1)–(3) can express, with the descriptions rigid, entail something the words of the sentence (4) can express. But what matters is what the words of (4) must *say* to follow from the premises, i.e., which proposition does follow. With the descriptions temporally rigid, the only one which follows validly is not heretical.

That I read (4) as (4b) or (4c) is the *only* reason I’m willing to concede that (1)–(4) has a reading on which it is sound. If temporally rigid descriptions don’t in fact operate as I say, or I’m wrong about the sense of “the Father” taken rigidly, then the Personal descriptions are essentially temporally non-rigid. “A Latin Trinity” argued that with the descriptions non-rigid, the argument has no sound reading. So if I’m wrong about how temporally rigid descriptions operate, the argument is simply unsound. One way or the other, my view is not Patripassian.<sup>1</sup> Certainly it is not if my view makes

<sup>1</sup>Hasker equates Patripassianism and “theopaschism.” A quick survey of some theological sources turned up uses of the latter term only to name a Christological position, not anything

the argument unsound on all readings. If I'm right that it also has a harmless sound reading, then claiming that the Father is on the Cross is like claiming that The Newborn is eligible to join the AARP: seriously misleading. The Newborn is not eligible *while* he is newborn, and in no segment of the Father's life is the Father on the Cross, though the God who is also the Father is as the Son on the Cross. Would any Christian want to deny that God the Father is the same God as is God the Son who was crucified?

The rest of what I have space enough to say I will put in the form of comments on quotes from Hasker.

[F]or (1a) and (2a) to be true, the Rockettes must exist throughout Jane's life. (326)

And so they do, as both are Jane. But they only temporarily satisfy "the leftmost Rockette" and "the rightmost Rockette."

[S]omething true of the leftmost Rockette is *not* true of the rightmost, namely that her wig fell off during the performance. (326)

Jane's wig fell off during the performance. Since Jane is both leftmost and rightmost, Hasker's claim is false. The wig fell off only while (on Jane's personal timeline) she was leftmost. It is true of the role of the leftmost but not the role of the rightmost that someone playing it lost her wig while (personal timeline) playing it.

We need to be able to generate true descriptions of public events (such as dance performances) *without* knowing all about the personal backgrounds, etc., of the participants. Some of the dancers . . . may have come through Leftow's Wells-o-matic. . . . This should make no difference to the truth of an empirical description that might be given by a spectator at the occasion. (326)

In commenting on this case, we need not confine ourselves to what someone in the audience who didn't know the setup would say. We do know the time travel history—as people in the audience would not—and I'm suggesting what to say about it given this knowledge. If the "ordinary empirical description" would be what Hasker says, it would be false, and offered only due to incomplete information. We speak as we ordinarily do *inter alia* because we never find ourselves dealing with time travel cases. If we began to, we'd have to start getting cautious about what we say. This wouldn't change the language or how we use it, merely the confidence with which we use it on some occasions.

that . . . "leftmost Rockette" and "rightmost Rockette" . . . pick out Jane at all times of her life . . . follows from the fact that "*=*" expresses strict identity. (327)

No. Temporally non-rigid descriptions can also flank "*=*." These do not pick out Jane at all times in her life. Taken non-rigidly, "leftmost Rockette" picks out Jane only when she is leftmost.

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Trinitarian, and if the Greek term *was* ever used as equivalent to "Patripassian," that is (I believe) only because some writers continued some New Testament texts' habit of using "God" and "the Father" interchangeably. All the orthodox said (and say) that Mary was the Theotokos, the God-bearer. If Mary bore God, God suffered on the Cross—in the human nature of His second person. But all the orthodox are not Patripassian. (My thanks here to Joseph Jedwab.)

"It follows," he says, that "all we can infer from (4a) are claims that apply to Jane equally in every episode of her life." . . . [But] (contrary to what Leftow has claimed), we *can* infer from (4a) that she was dancing at those locations . . . *when the reference of the descriptions was fixed.* (327)

We can't infer from (4a) that Jane *was* there then, because we can't infer from (4a) that this episode is now in the past. But perhaps we can take Hasker to mean that we can infer something tenseless, that Jane tenselessly dances there then. This tenseless truth is true in every episode of Jane's life, at least if there are truths about future contingents. So being able to infer this is not contrary to what I said.

In order to be "the leftmost Rockette" (read rigidly), Jane must satisfy that description *on the occasion when the reference was fixed*. If she wasn't leftmost on *that* occasion, she isn't "the (note the implication of uniqueness) leftmost Rockette." (327)

No matter when Jane danced leftmost, she'd be *the* leftmost. There can only be one leftmost dancer in any chorus line. The reference-fixing description here is not "the leftmost Rockette at t," but "the leftmost Rockette," used at t. She satisfies the latter at any time she's leftmost, even if it's not t. The time at which reference is fixed is part of a reference fixer's context of the use but doesn't become part of its sense, I think. If that's correct, she'd be the leftmost Rockette (read rigidly) had she danced there on any other occasion too. Further, she'd be the leftmost Rockette even if no-one had ever fixed the reference of that description to her. The description would apply even if no-one had noticed that it did.

Suppose Leftow was right, and there was just one Rockette. Then would a member of the audience who learned the true story be entitled to a refund . . . because he got to see only one dancer instead of the twenty or so that normally perform? (327)

He saw one chorus line, which is what he paid for. They happened to be the same woman at different points in her life. That was a bonus; most don't get to see that. He also saw twenty dancers, counting dancers in one way mentioned above.

Each dancer can truly say, "I am Jane." Yet [there] are . . . many different "Jane-shaped objects," each occupying a different region of space; these objects patently are not identical with each other, and if they aren't they can't be identical with Jane *simpliciter*. (328)

The objects don't *look* like the same substance, as they are in different places at the same public time. But if Jane time travels, they are the same substance, unless time travel *entails* that they are (say) temporal parts of a four-dimensional Jane. Hasker doesn't argue this. I don't believe it, but can't take it up here. On another score, I'm just puzzled. Hasker says that there are many dancers onstage, each can truly say "I am Jane," and none are identical with Jane *simpliciter*. If they aren't identical with Jane, what truth does "I am Jane" express?

[R]oles don't make tackles . . . only players can do those things. (328)

True, but all I said was that in the circumstance described, the penalty would be assessed counting by roles played—not that it's the role, not the player, that tackles.

Leftow makes two . . . claims which seem inconsistent with things said in the original article. First of all, he implies that in the different versions of the arguments . . . he never departed from strict, Leibnizian identity. But that is not true. He does discuss interpretations according to which the descriptions are read non-rigidly—that is, so that “the leftmost Rockette” does not refer (save) when Jane is playing that role, and “the leftmost Rockette = Jane” is true only (then). But in that case the leftmost Rockette *cannot* be strictly identical with Jane, because all manner of things are true of Jane that are not true of the leftmost Rockette. (329)

As “Time Travel and the Trinity” noted, identity-statements can involve the ordinary strict Leibnizian “=” yet be only temporarily true. My chair is a temporary existent; before and after its existence, it is not true that Chair = Chair. Reading “the leftmost Rockette” non-rigidly, it is true that Jane = the leftmost Rockette only while she is leftmost. I asked Hasker for an example of something true in this case of Jane but not of the leftmost. He replied,

If “the leftmost Rockette” refers only while Jane is playing that role, then it does not refer to anything when Jane was, say, five years old. So “Jane had a birthday party when she turned five” will be true, but “the leftmost Rockette had a birthday party when Jane turned five” will not be true.<sup>2</sup>

But this is wrong. Taken non-rigidly, “the leftmost Rockette” needn't refer to Jane; it refers to whomever is playing the role when it is tokened. Read non-rigidly, “tLR” refers only while someone is leftmost, and refers to that person. So if someone danced leftmost when Jane was five, it referred to that dancer, not Jane, and when Jane is leftmost, it refers to Jane. Now Jane did have the party. So while “tLR” refers to Jane, the sentence “tLR had the party” says something true. Once Jane is no longer leftmost, “tLR” taken non-rigidly no longer refers to Jane. So then “tLR had a party” says something false unless there is someone else then dancing leftmost who had a party. “tLR” did not refer to Jane when she *was* five, as she was not then leftmost. But while she was leftmost it referred to Jane, and so whatever was then true of Jane—including that she had the party—was true of tLR.<sup>3</sup>

he implies that I was misreading him by interpreting him as asserting that the argument (1)–(4), with “=” interpreted as strict identity, is sound. I am truly mystified by this. It is indeed the case, as he says, that “I gave reasons to consider (1)–(4) both invalid and unsound.” (329)

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<sup>2</sup>Personal communication.

<sup>3</sup>Hasker commented that on this reading, it is true that Jane = the leftmost Rockette only while Jane was playing that role, and so the claim is false while he and I discuss the matter. Fair enough: imagine that we're discussing the argument while the performance is going on. Why not?

I should have added “on the relevant reading(s).” I did not take Hasker to misread me. My view is just that if there is a reading on which the argument is sound, it poses no threat to Trinitarian orthodoxy.

self-love by itself, unaccompanied by a comparable love for some other person or persons, is somewhat lacking. (331)

In the time travel case I discussed, the love is relevantly like love of someone else. The Trinitarian case works similarly.

another reason to reject both “God = the Father” and “God = the Son” (is that) the Father . . . has essentially the propert(y) of being unbegotten. The Son has essentially the property of being begotten . . . God cannot have (both) essentially. . . It follows that God is distinct from . . . Father (or) Son . . . not identical with each of them, as (1) and (2) assert. (332 n16)

The claim that the Father has that property essentially is not innocent. It asserts a *de re* truth when perhaps all Trinitarian theology requires is a *de dicto* truth, that necessarily, if something is the Father, it is unbegotten. (Read that “if” with a personal-timeline “while” in mind.) The modality matters. If Hasker raised a problem with the simple claims that the Father is unbegotten, the Son begotten, and God can’t be both, I could reply that what’s true is that God can’t be both at once on His own timeline, and on my view He never is. But one can’t lack an essential property no matter where on one’s timeline one is. So one reply to Hasker is simply to ask how he justifies what is not innocent in his premise. On my view, all the situation comes to is that God essentially lives a life in which He in one stream causes Himself to live another concurrent stream. He is essentially both unbegotten and begotten, because He is essentially such that in one stream He is not begotten and in another He is.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>On the exegesis of Aquinas, Hasker intimates that I see my view in Thomas because I brought it to the reading of his text. Not so. As a point of biography, the idea of the thing first hit me precisely as I was trying to puzzle Thomas out. This is no guarantee I have him right, of course—perhaps my Trinity is to Thomas’s as Kripkenstein is to Wittgenstein. But in addition to texts, which I could multiply, there is an argument that arises from something said in “A Latin Trinity.” I noted there that Thomas clearly says two things: that the Father has God’s trope of deity, and that God = His (trope of) deity. It follows that God is *somehow* in the Father. I now add that Thomas commits himself on *how* God is there. He writes that the divine essence is predicated of the Father *per modum identitatis*—by the mode of identity—due to the divine simplicity (*ST* Ia 39, 5 ad 4). (Note that a claim argued only about God, that God is simple, drives this argument that the Father = the divine essence. That is itself some indication that Thomas sees “God” and “the Father” as co-referential.) There is no ambiguity about what “the mode of identity” means in this case. Simplicity of Thomas’s sort enforces the strict Leibnizian identity of all putatively distinct items in the simple being. So we have it explicitly that deity = God and deity = the Father. Unless Thomas does something quite strange with the concept of identity precisely here, which moreover would violate his understanding of divine simplicity elsewhere, it follows that for him, God = the Father. Stepping back from this, if God is somehow in the Father, the relation between the two is either identity or constitution. If Thomas thinks the divine Persons are simple, how could he also think that each contains a constituting object distinct from itself?