7-1-2016

The Logical Space of Social Trinitarianism

Matthew Davidson

THE LOGICAL SPACE OF SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

Matthew Davidson

I try to lay bare some of the conceptual space in which one may be a Social Trinitarian. I organize the paper around answers to five questions. These are: (1) How do the three Persons of the Trinity relate to the Godhead? (2) How many divine beings or gods are there? (3) How many distinct centers of consciousness are there in the Godhead? (4) How many omnicompetent beings are there? (5) How are the Persons of the Trinity individuated? I try to make clear costs and benefits of various answers to these questions.

In this paper I set out some territory for thinking about the Trinity in the context of Social Trinitarianism (ST).[1] I'll begin by saying a bit about what I take ST to be. I then will set out a series of questions someone who holds to ST should seek to answer. Different answers will be constitutive of different types of ST. My goal here is largely to set out and elucidate some of the logical space which various social Trinitarian views occupy. However, I will consider reasons for adopting different positions, and the reader will see where my own allegiances lie.

On Social Trinitarianism

ST has enjoyed a renaissance of support recently.[2] It finds its roots in the early Greek-speaking church, particularly in the work of authors like Gregory of Nyssa.[3] It sometimes can be difficult to ascertain exactly what ST is supposed to *be*, and how it differs from "Latin" flavors of the Trinity. For the purposes of this paper, I will take ST to entail the following three propositions.

> (ST1) There are three separate Persons of the Trinity, who are fully persons in a modern sense of the term.

---

[1]Throughout the paper I will assume classical identity, as I believe a) relative identity is of dubious coherence and b) classical identity can go a long way toward addressing the nature of the Trinity.

[2]See, e.g., Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*; Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*; C. Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism"; Wierenga, "Trinity and Polytheism"; Layman, *Philosophical Reflections.*

[3]See Gregory of Nyssa, "On 'Not three gods.'"

(ST2) Each Person of the Trinity has its own mental life.

(ST3) Necessarily, the will of each of the Persons of the Trinity cannot conflict with those of the other Persons of the Trinity.

One might wonder how accepting (ST1)–(ST3) differs from being an orthodox Trinitarian. Or how accepting these propositions differs from being a "Latin" Trinitarian. These are serious questions, meriting a much longer discussion than I have space for here. There is significant disagreement among those who claim to hold to ST as to what it is, and how it differs from Latin or even orthodox Trinitarianism. I've opted for a characterization of ST that would include most (all, I think!) of those who call themselves Social Trinitarians. But I think it's useful here to see how others in the literature characterize ST.

Carl Mosser[4] sets out four propositions that he says are constitutive of Social Trinitarian views.

1. Inter-personal unity is irreducibly social in nature.

2. The members of the Trinity are persons in the full, modern sense.

3. Therefore, the unity of the Trinity is genuinely social in nature.

4. The divine persons interpenetrate, co-inhere, and mutually indwell each other in *perichoresis*.

Hasker,[5] who is one of the principal defenders of ST today, cites Mosser's four propositions approvingly in his own characterization of ST.

From McCall and Rea, in their introduction to their collection of essays on the Trinity,[6] we have:[7]

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

(ST1[MR]) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Sprit are "of one essence" but are not numerically the same substance. Rather the divine persons are consubstantial only in the sense that they share the divine nature in common. Furthermore, the sharing of a common nature can be understood in a fairly straightforward way via the "social analogy" in which Peter, James, and John share human nature.[8]

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

---

[4]Mosser, "Fully Social Trinitarianism."

[5]Hasker, *Metaphysics*, 20–21.

[6]McCall and Rea, *Philosophical and Theological Essays*, 3.

[7]McCall and Rea call these three propositions "(ST1)," "(ST2)," and "(ST3)"; I've added "[MR]" to distinguish them from my own propositions with those labels.

[8]Hasker says of this thesis, "[T]his may indeed be held by some Social Trinitarians, but not by all. For instance it would be rejected by both William Craig and myself; both of us are present in the McCall-Rea anthology as representatives of Social Trinitarianism!" (Hasker, *Metaphysics*, 22).

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

In "Social Trinity and Tritheism," a seminal contemporary work in the resurgence of ST, Cornelius Plantinga says:

> By strong or social trinitarianism I mean a theory that meets at least the following three conditions: (1) The theory must have Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct centers of knowledge, love, and action. Since each of these capacities requires consciousness, it follows that, on this sort of theory, Father, Son, and Spirit would be viewed as distinct centers of consciousness, or in short as *persons* in some full sense of that term. (2) Any accompanying sub-theory of divine simplicity must be modest enough to be consistent with condition (1), that is, with the real distinctness of trinitarian persons. This second condition is not idle. From Augustine to such twentieth-century trinitarians as R. C. Moberly and Taymans d'Eypernon, one finds statements in which Father, Son, and Spirit appear to be full persons, but are also said to be each identical with the divine essence, thus making the *de facto* number of persons in God hard to estimate. (3) Father, Son, and Spirit must be regarded as tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible the judgment that they constitute a particular social unit. In such social monotheism, it will be appropriate to use the designator "God" to refer to the whole Trinity, where the Trinity is understood to be one thing, even if it is a complex thing consisting of persons, essences, and relations.[9]

Hasker quotes this Plantinga passage himself when he says:

> For purposes of the present study it will be useful to have available a fairly minimal definition of Social trinitarianism, one that will capture the core commitments of the position while leaving open the various points on which Social trinitarians disagree with one another. The formula I shall offer comes form what I take to be an unimpeachable source, namely Corneilus Plantinga, Jr., one of the acknowledged leaders of recent Social trinitarianism.[10]

Hasker then proceeds to adopt (with minor tweaks and/or clarifications) the three claims from Plantinga above as constituting ST. Hasker acknowledges that some will say that his characterization of ST along the lines of Plantinga's counts some people as Social Trinitarians who wouldn't consider themselves to be Social Trinitarians. He thinks, though, as do I, that adopting something like Plantinga's claims as constituting ST is the best way to make sense of various people having different views all of whom claim to be Social Trinitarians. If the reader compares my (ST1)–(ST3), she will see that my own characterization of ST is along the lines of Plantinga's (and Hasker's).

Now, suppose one accepts (ST1)–(ST3). There are a number of other questions one should answer, the answers to which will delineate different

---

[9]Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 22.

[10]Hasker, *Metaphysics*, 22.

views within the bounds of ST. We turn to a series of these questions, and a series of answers to each question.

Question 1: How do the Three Persons of the Trinity Relate to the Godhead?

Much of the recent discussion of this question has centered on taking lessons from the metaphysics of material objects and modeling the relation of the Persons to the Godhead on them.[11] Here, I will focus mainly on those sorts of answers, as I feel that they have the best shot at getting the relationship right. Since the publication of David Wiggins's *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity*,[12]], and certainly since Peter van Inwagen's *Material Beings*,[13] there has been a great deal of attention paid to the question of the relation of the many (material things like quarks and electrons) and the one (material things like a statue) that are made up of the many. The usual example here is a statue and the clay molecules that make it up. What is the relationship between the statue and the clay molecules? Of course, it can't be identity, for the statue is one thing and the molecules many. There are a number of different answers to this question that one may find in the literature. I want to focus on two of them.

Composition without constitution: The clay molecules compose the statue.[14]

Constitution: The clay molecules compose a lump/parcel of matter or aggregate, and the lump/parcel of matter or aggregate constitutes the statue.[15]

First, some clarification about the terminology above. Composition is the normal relation between parts and wholes as set out in Leonard and Goodman.[16] Composition is a many-one relation: many parts compose one whole. Aggregates are material objects that exist if and only if their parts exist.[17] In particular, aggregates can survive the scattering of parts. So if one takes an aggregate of clay molecules and spreads them to the far reaches of the galaxy and doesn't destroy any of the molecules, the aggregate persists. Lumps/parcels of matter are like aggregates in that they exist only if all their parts exist. But lumps/parcels of matter can't survive the scattering of their parts in the way aggregates can.

---

[11]This is perhaps not surprising, as both try to answer questions about how the many (say, atoms or divine Persons) relate to the one (say, the table or the Godhead).

[12]Wiggins, *Identity*.

[13]Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*.

[14]Parthood here can be spatial or temporal.

[15]See Wiggins, "On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time" and *Sameness and Substance Renewed*; and Baker, "Why Constitution is not Identity" and *Persons and Bodies*.

[16]Leonard and Goodman, "The Calculus of Individuals and its Uses." See Simons, *Parts* for an extensive discussion of mereology; see Sider, *Four Dimensionalism* and van Inwagen, *Material Beings* for further discussion of parthood.

[17]The term "aggregate" is from Wiggins, *Identity*.

Constitution is a more vexed relation. The first clear contemporary statement of the view is in Wiggins.[18] The person who has done the most recently to articulate and defend the constitution relation is Lynne Baker.[19] According to Baker, constitution is a relation that is "intermediate between identity and separate existence."[20] It is a (usually) one-one relation, or (sometimes) a one-many relation. Things like aggregates or lumps (or things that have the identity conditions of lumps—like pieces of marble or bronze) are typical constituters, and things like statues, trees, people, and the like are typical constitutees. In paradigmatic cases of constitution, like that of a lump of clay and a statue, there are (at least) two objects in the same place at the same time. Constitution is a different relation than identity (though identity is a one-one relation, and usually so is constitution), and it's a different relation than composition (which is a many-one relation). In Baker,[21] there is a long discussion and defense of Baker's own definition of constitution, a conception from which people like Brower and Rea[22] and Hasker[23] have drawn. It will suffice for our purposes to note that her definition of constitution amounts to constitution's being equivalent to necessary coincidence in the following sense: necessarily, if the constituting thing exists and has the right properties, the constituted thing is co-located with it. So the lump of clay constitutes the statue in virtue of the fact that necessarily if the lump is statue-shaped (and the artistic community takes the right attitudes toward it), a statue is coincident with it.[24] For others, more than necessary coincidence of this sort is required; it's also necessary that the constituting and constituted objects share parts. This constraint is important, as analyses that don't involve part-sharing (like Baker's) are open to counterexamples involving temporarily overlapping objects or entities.[25]

With these terminological preliminaries done, we turn to elucidating some of the logical space around the relation of the three divine Persons and the Godhead. I won't list all of the options here; I'll list just those with some degree of plausibility. We are constrained by the fact that constitution is a one-one or one-many relation, and composition is a many-one relation.

Answer 1.1: The Persons of the Trinity are parts of the Godhead, and the Godhead is composed of the Persons of the Trinity.[26]

---

[18]Wiggins, *Identity* and "On Being in the Same Place."

[19]See Baker, "Why Constitution is not Identity," *Persons and Bodies,* and *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life.* See also Thomson, "The Statue and the Clay."

[20]Baker, *Persons and Bodies*, 27.

[21]Baker, *Persons and Bodies*, 43.

[22]Brower and Rea, "Material Constitution and the Trinity."

[23]Hasker, *Metaphysics.*

[24]Leonard and Goodman, "The Calculus of Individuals." Theodore Sider characterizes Baker's definition of constitution in the same sort of way in his review of *Persons and Bodies*.

[25]See Sider "Review of *Persons and Bodies*" and Zimmerman, "Persons and Bodies."

[26]See Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations* and Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting."

Answer 2.1: The Persons of the Trinity are constituted by something (e.g., the divine nature or the divine mind, or God or the Godhead).[27]

Answer 3.1: The Persons of the Trinity compose something (perhaps the divine nature or the divine mind), and this constitutes the Godhead.

Answer 4.1: Each Person of the Trinity is constituted by something (perhaps, e.g., the Father is constituted by the Father's mind), and together the three Persons compose the Godhead.

Answer 5.1: Each Person of the Trinity is constituted by something (perhaps, e.g., the Father is constituted by the Father's mind), and together the three Persons compose something (perhaps the divine nature or mind) and this constitutes the Godhead.

So far as I can tell, only Answer 1.1 and Answer 2.1 have defenders.[28] Answer 3.1 is analogous to the sort of one-one constitution scenario with a tree that one finds in Wiggins:[29] the individual things (tree molecules) compose something (an aggregate) and this constitutes the main object in question (the tree). On the other hand, Answer 2.1 involves a case of one-many constitution. This is unusual, as paradigm cases of constitution are one-one.[30] So one might have thought that Answer 3.1 would be the more natural solution where the Godhead is constituted by something.

Answer 4.1 and Answer 5.1 may at first look a bit Rube Goldbergesque. But consider what constitution-theorists[31] say about persons: they think that persons are constituted by their bodies or their brains (or perhaps their minds). So Answer 4.1 looks to be a natural extension of that sort of thinking to the case of the Trinity where the Godhead is composed of the divine Persons. And Answer 5.1 looks to be a natural extension of that sort of thinking to the case of the Trinity where the Godhead is constituted by one thing (as in Answer 3.1, which is itself a natural way to think about constitution in the Trinity).

As I said above, it's important that there be part sharing between the constituting and constituted thing. It's not clear how that would work in the case of Answer 2.1, as it's not clear how the divine mind or divine nature have parts.[32] Answer 4.1 and Answer 5.1 have similar difficulties.

---

[27]See Hasker, *Metaphysics* and Brower and Rea, "Material Constitution and the Trinity." I don't mean to imply here that Brower and Rea accept ST, which they claim to reject. I myself am not sure how to characterize their view; this is in part due to its appeal to both hylomorphism and relative identity.

[28]I should note that historically the accepted view on the relation of each of the persons to the Godhead is identity due to the fact that God is simple. But I take it that divine simplicity isn't consistent with ST.

[29]Wiggins, "On Being in the Same Place."

[30]See Sosa, "Subjects Among Other Things" for discussion of this.

[31]E.g., Baker, *Persons and Bodies.*

[32]This need not be because of divine simplicity. Even if one denies divine simplicity, it's not clear that the divine mind or divine nature have parts in the relevant way.

In extending the constitution relation from the realm of material objects to the Trinity, one also must worry about extending conceptual difficulties the constitution relation has in the realm of material objects. There are a number of well-known difficulties with constitution in material objects.[33] First, there is a significant amount that is left brute and unexplained on constitution views. The lump and the statue share the same parts, yet this one has the property *being a statue* and that one has the property *being a lump*. Why is this? One might say that the differences in sorts are grounded in differences in persistence conditions. But why does *this* object get the lump persistence conditions, and *that* one get the statue persistence conditions? This seems to be brute. (Or the difference in persistence conditions are analyzed in terms of the differences in sortals, and the difference in sortals is brute.)[34] Second, along these same lines there are concerns with respect to assignment of properties to the two objects. For instance, in this space is a statue and a lump. We put the statue on a scale and weigh it, and the scale reads 25 pounds. How much does the statue weigh, and how much does the lump weigh? Presumably the statue has to have some weight; it's a macroscopic physical object. Let's designate the weight of the statue as w and that of the lump as $25-w$ pounds. Now we smash the statue such that only the lump remains, and weigh the lump on the scale. The scale still says 25 lbs. How did the lump get heavier?[35]

Third, there are worries about an "explosion of reality."[36] Say that a statue has persistence conditions C. Call a statue$_1$ anything with persistence conditions C_1, where conditions C_1 are slightly more liberal than C. (So a statue$_1$ can survive slightly more smashing than a statue can. Smash a soft clay statue with a hammer, and at some time you will have a statue$_1$ and a statue, and a lump; and later you will have only a statue$_1$ and a lump. Later still you will have only a lump.) These non-standard predicates with different persistence conditions may be generated en masse. The standard way of dealing with them would be to supervaluate and say that there are statue$_1$s and statue$_2$s etc. where the lump is located, and our predicate "is a statue" is vague between them.[37] But this involves admitting there is a large number of unusual objects where we initially thought there was just a statue and a lump (or a statue and a lump and an aggregate!) Another option is to adopt some sort of anti-realism: There is just the statue because

---

[33]Though see Baker, *Persons and Bodies* for some replies.

[34]Sortals are categories that specify the sort of object something is.

[35]These first two worries have the following sort of form: Why does this object get property p and this other coinciding object not get p? (See Zimmerman, "Theories of Masses" for more of these sorts of objections; Baker, in *Persons and Bodies*, replies to these objections.) The core of her response comes from a denial of part-sharing between coinciding objects. But this opens her up to other objections (see Zimmerman, "Persons and Bodies" and Sider "Review of *Persons and Bodies*").

[36]See Sosa, "Subjects Among Other Things" and "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism."

[37]Here, supervaluations are a way of assigning truth conditions to vague sentences in natural language.

we "make the world" that way.[38] But this also is not an ideal solution for those with realist scruples, (and certainly suboptimal when applied to the Godhead!)

There are other worries about constitution in the material realm.[39] Those set out above suggest that the relation is at best a problematic one. So at best we're extending a problematic relation (even in its best-understood physical instance) to the case of the Trinity as a way of trying to elucidate an already-difficult concept.

But does composition work any better? I think it does. Composition is a relation that (pretty much!) everyone understands in the case of material objects. We understand what it is or would be for a material object to have other objects as parts.[40] Indeed, mereology (the study of parts and wholes) is even extended to the realm of the nonphysical.[41] Philosophers talk about things like propositions having parts and structure. Now, obviously these aren't spatial parts. But they are parts in some sense. The case of non-physical parts with things like propositions plausibly may be extended to the case of the Trinity, as with Answer 1. (Certainly if we can extend constitution in the way Hasker and Brower/Rea do, we may extend composition in this way!) So I'd suggest that if we're going to extend a relation from material objects to the case of the Trinity, we're better off extending composition rather than constitution.[42]

Question 2: How Many Divine Beings, or Gods, Are There?

We move on to a second question that arises in thinking about the logical space within ST. Some of the answers below may (*prima facie*) look obviously heretical (or non-orthodox). But they are worth stating anyway in order to provide context for the views under serious consideration. It is not clear to me where some contemporary philosophers and theologians stand on these answers; I've tried my best to place different thinkers appropriately.

Answer 1.2: There are three divine beings and one God (who is distinct from the divine beings).

Answer 2.2: There are four divine beings and one God (who is one of the divine beings). All four are divine in the same manner.

---

[38]See Sosa, "Subjects Among Other Things" and "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism."

[39]See, e.g., Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, chapter 5.

[40]See van Inwagen, *Material Beings* for an excellent exploration of this.

[41]See, e.g., Bealer, *Quality and Concept* and King, Soames, and Speaks, *New Thinking About Propositions.*

[42]I should note that composition isn't *entirely* unproblematic; for instance, there are various answers to van Inwagen's Special Composition Question in *Material Beings.* But questions about composition typically center on when it occurs, not whether it's at all coherent (and thus could occur).

Answer 3.2: There are four divine beings and one God (who is one of the divine beings). God is divine in a different manner from the Persons of the Trinity.[43]

Answer 4.2: There are three divine beings and three gods.

Answer 5.2: There are four divine beings and four gods. All are divine in the same manner.

Answer 6.2: There are four divine beings and four gods. The Persons of the Trinity are divine in a different manner from the Godhead.

Answer 7.2: There are three divine beings and no God.[44]

Answer 8.2: There are three divine beings and one God (who is one of the divine beings).[45]

Now, it might seem that some of these answers are obviously wrong. I will begin by discussing and trying to motivate some of the stranger ones. Let's begin with a principal creedal source of Trinitarian thinking, the (so-called) Athanasian Creed.[46] From line 15 of the Creed, we have, "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God." Likewise, with line 19, "For . . . we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord." Presumably the Godhead is God, too. So we count four gods (Answer 5.2 and Answer 6.2).

Now, the lines immediately following these two lines in the Athanasian Creed read:

(Line 16): And they are not three gods, but one God.

(Line 20): [W]e are forbidden by the catholic religion to say: There are three gods or three Lords.

This of course doesn't preclude us from claiming each of the Persons is God. But there is pressure here, for if "is God" (*deus*) is read as an identity claim, we run into trouble. From lines 15 and 16 we can derive the identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is inconsistent not only with orthodoxy (it's pretty clearly a Sabellian position), but also with line 5 of the Creed, "For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit." The temptation at this point is to read "is

---

[43]Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations* and Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism." I put a question mark here because Leftow ("Anti Social Trinitarianism") suggests that Cornelius Plantinga holds this view. But it's not clear to me that he does.

[44]I *believe* this is Swinburne's position in *The Christian God.*

[45]This is Arius's view.

[46]I should note that though the Athanasian Creed is accepted widely by those in the Western Church outside the Westminster Confession, it's not accepted in the Eastern Church. So one should not afford it the authority of something like the Nicene Creed. See Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* for discussion. And of course the Nicene (Nicene-Constantinopolitan) Creed of 381 is where we first get a clear creedal statement of the nature of the Holy Spirit.

God" line 15 and line 19 as an adjective, rather than an identity relation.[47] Suppose we do that here.[48] How then should we understand the semantic content of "is God"? The most plausible way to take it is as expressing *being divine*; that is, as having the same semantic content as "is divine." If we're counting just the Persons as divine, then we arrive at three divine beings (Answers 1.2, 4.2, 7.2, or 8.2).

What about Answer 7.2? Surely it's implausible if one desires to hold to orthodox Christianity. Yet it's not clear to me that Swinburne[49] doesn't hold to this position. Suppose one takes each Person of the Trinity to be divine in a high-octane sense: each is omnicompetent (omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient), has its own mental life not shared by the others, etc. One might think that the three Persons of the Trinity are the only divine entities. What then of "there is one God" from the creeds? Swinburne says

> What in denying tritheism, the view that there are three gods, were Councils ruling out? I suggest that they were denying that there were three *independent* divine beings, any of which could exist without the other; or which could act independently of each other.
>
> On the account which I have given, the three divine individuals taken together would form a collective source of the being of all other things; then members would be totally mutually dependent and necessarily jointly behind each other's acts.
>
> . . . The claim that "there is only one God" is to be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity.[50]

Of course, Swinburne will claim that "there is one God" is true. But it's not true in virtue of "God" referring to a particular being.[51] Swinburne is able to affirm the truth of the historic creeds, but only by construing the semantic role of "God" in a nonstandard way.[52]

Arius accepts a version of Answer 8.2. On Arius's view, God the Father is God, though all the persons of the Trinity are divine. This, of course, isn't orthodox. The Athanasian and Nicene creeds were reacting to the sort of Arianism we see in Answer 8.2.

What about answers in which there are multiple gods (Answers 4.2–6.2)? I can imagine someone looking at the Athanasian Creed and reasoning in

---

[47]Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting," 211; Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 180–182.

[48]Indeed, it is noteworthy that the other nearby predicates in the Creed (e.g., eternal, uncreated, infinite) are clearly adjectives.

[49]Swinburne, *The Christian God.*

[50]Swinburne, *The Christian God.*, 180 ff.

[51]Note that this holds if one takes names to refer directly in a Millian way, or via a sense in a Fregean way; or if one thinks that names are disguised definite descriptions and don't strictly refer (à la Russell). I take it that the "office" view of the semantics of "God" is some version of the latter two theories.

[52]One position that Swinburne might want to adopt is the view that "God" is a plural referring term. It looks like it's a singular referring term, but it actually picks out the three Persons of the Trinity. The fact that "God" takes singular verbs like "is" is merely an artifact of grammar.

the following sort of way: "The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. They are distinct beings. So there are three gods." In addition, one might continue, "Then there is the Godhead/Trinity. That also is God, and distinct from the Persons. So there are four gods." Or, suppose one takes "God" to be a plural referring term, like "The Smothers Brothers." This would be a straightforward route to Answer 4.2. "How many Smothers Brothers are there? Two. How many gods are there? Three." Overall, it seems to me that it is preferable from the point of view of orthodoxy to stand firm on there being one God, even if one winds up giving some sort of deflationary account of claims that each of the Persons is God (as Swinburne does). So, it is better to say that there are multiple divine beings (and this is the sense in which the Persons are God) and just one God.

This leaves us with Answers 1.2–3.2. On each of these, there is just one God (the Godhead) and each of the Persons is divine. Differences arise when we ask about the divinity of the Godhead. (Is the Godhead also divine? If so, is the Godhead divine in the same way as the other Persons?) I think that knockdown arguments are hard to come by when deciding between Answers 1.2–3.2. But it seems to me better to have the Godhead being divine than not having it be divine. One way in which one might think it is divine in a different sense than that whereby the Persons are divine is to think that the divinity of the Godhead is somehow grounded in the divinity of the Persons. The Persons are divine in a primary sense, and the Godhead divine in a derivative sense. (We will discuss this sort of grounding further in subsequent questions.) On the other hand, the same sort of thinking may lead one to claim divinity for the Persons and the Godhead in the *same* sense, in the way we might say that the committee is located in this room in the same sense in which its members are located in this room. "Where are the members? Here. Where is the committee? Here. Are they both here in the same sense? Of course."

In answering Question 2, I suggest that we should avoid answers on which there is more than or fewer than one God. I think it's better to have the Godhead be divine rather than having it not be divine. I have no strong intuitions in favor of the Godhead's being divine in the same way the Persons are divine. I think there is space for the orthodox Christian theist to decide here.

Question 3: How Many Distinct Centers of Consciousness Are There in the Godhead?

Answer 1.3: There are three distinct centers of consciousness (one for each of the Persons).[53]

Answer 2.3: There are four distinct centers of consciousness (one for each of the Persons and one for the Godhead).

---

[53]Swinburne, *The Christian God.*

Since we are looking options within ST, there will be at least three distinct (different) centers of consciousness. The question faced by the defender of ST is this: What sort of entity is the Godhead? In particular, is there a fourth individual with its own mental life in addition to the three Persons? How one answers this question will be affected by how one answers Questions 1 and 2. Suppose one adopts Answer 1.1, the view that the three Persons compose the Godhead. It is then not unnatural to think that there is a distinct individual with its own mental life. (Compare two halves of a table. When the halves are in contact such that they compose a table, there is a distinct object (a table) with different powers and dispositions than the parts of the table.) Suppose one adopts Answer 2.1, and says that the divine mind constitutes the three Persons. It is again natural to say that there is a fourth center of consciousness involved in the Trinity. (On the other hand, if the divine nature is the constituting entity, it is less natural to say there is a fourth center of consciousness.)

Similarly, answers to Question 2 will affect how one answers Question 3. Suppose one adopts Answer 7.2 (there are three divine Persons and no God). Presumably, since "God" isn't a referring term, there won't be a fourth center of consciousness. On the other hand, if one adopts Answers 2.2, 3.2, 5.2, or 6.2, it might not seem strange to say that there are four centers of consciousness involved with the Trinity.

How should one answer Question 3 apart from one's answers to the previous questions? To the extent one wants there to be one God, there will be some pressure to think of this being as having its own mental life. Suppose we think that the Persons compose a distinct being, God. What would this being be like if it didn't have its own mental life? Christians pray to God (and they pray to God the Father and sometimes call this being "God," but they also pray to God), and they claim that God has desires and beliefs. These suggest that the Godhead has its own mental states.

On the other hand, return to the committee analogy. We might think of the members of the committee as composing the committee. We also might make requests of the committee, and talk as though the committee has desires (the evaluation committee wants you to attend more department meetings). But really the committee doesn't have desires, as it doesn't have its own mind. Talking about the desires of the committee is a convenient fiction for talking about the desires of those who compose the committee. But do we really want to say that God's (the Godhead's) desires are a fiction, and that strictly speaking God has no mental states? What sort of an entity is the Godhead, if the Godhead has no mind of his or her own?[54]

---

[54]There are some (like Pettit, "Groups With Minds of Their Own") who think that groups can have mental states. They argue that there is group behavior that can't be explained by the mental states of the members of the group. I have not the space to adequately address these arguments here. But I will say two things. First, one needs to adopt a particular intentional stance-cum-functionalist position in the philosophy of mind to be tempted by the explanations given by Pettit et al. Second, it is not at all clear to me that the group behavior in question isn't actually explicable in terms of group-directed individual mental states. To

Of course the worry here is that we've moved beyond the Scylla of Sabellianism and the Charybdis of tritheism, and now need to be policing ourselves for quadtheism. This is a legitimate concern. However, if "God" is a singular referring term,[55] it may seem hard to deny that this being has a mind. To the extent that one finds it implausible that God doesn't have his/her own mind, one will find a view on which "God" isn't a referring term more plausible.

Question 4: How many Omnicompetent Beings Are There?

Answer 1.4: There is one omnicompetent being, the Godhead.[56]

Answer 2.4: There are three omnicompetent beings.[57]

Answer 3.4: There are four omnicompetent beings.

Answer 4.4: There is one omnicompetent being, God the Father.[58]

Any of the first three answers seem plausible, and the plausibility of each will depend on the extent to which one takes the reality of the Persons as primary or of God (as a whole) as primary. There is an initial concern in considering Answers 2.4 and 3.4: How could there be more than one omnipotent being? Concerns arise if omnipotence involves (roughly) the ability to do anything possible, as it would seem as though multiple "omnipotent" beings could keep each other from bringing about possible states of affairs that they, *qua* omnipotent beings, ought to be able to bring about. There are multiple ways an advocate of Answers 2.4 or 3.4 might proceed. Swinburne[59] suggests that the Father might lay down rules in generating the Son and the Holy Spirit that would preclude a clash of wills. Yandell[60] thinks that the moral perfection of the Persons would make it impossible that they act in such a way to thwart the wills of the other Persons. One might also adopt an analysis of omnipotence that relies on maximal power, or the sort of power a maximally excellent being has. These sorts of analyses of omnipotence could (*prima facie*) be made to be consistent with having one's will limited in some respects.

I take it that the idea behind Answer 1.4 is that the powers of the individual Persons would "sum" to omnicompetence at the level of the Godhead.[61] The extent to which this is coherent will depend on the sort of

---

the extent it is, it seems better to me not to attribute mental states to the group rather than the individuals who make up the group.

[55] Again, see Swinburne, *The Christian God* for someone who thinks it's not.

[56] Layman, "Tritheism and the Trinity," and Brown, *The Divine Trinity.*

[57] Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting," and Swinburne *The Christian God.*

[58] Again, this is Arius's view.

[59] Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 173 ff.

[60] Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting."

[61] See, e.g., Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, 300–301.

analyses of divine attributes one gives.[62] Suppose one takes omnipotence to involve (roughly) the ability to bring about all possible states of affairs.[63] One could see, then, how three non-omnipotent beings' (A, B, C) power could sum to omnipotence. Start with the ability (roughly!) to bring about any possible state of affairs, and assign that power to A. Now, imagine we're going to limit A's power in the following way: There are two wholly disjoint sets of possible states of affairs, S1 and S2, such that A can't bring about the states of affairs in S1 and S2. Otherwise, A can bring about any possible state of affairs. B and C are able to bring about the states of affairs in S1 and S2 respectively. So the powers of A and B and C sum to omnipotence. (We could imagine a similar maneuver with an analysis of omniscience on which being omniscient involves (roughly) knowing all true propositions. We also can imagine similar maneuvers with analyses of omnipotence and omniscience in terms of power and knowledge (respectively) that a maximally-excellent/most perfect being would have.)

The problem is that there is no reason within orthodoxy to think that power is so-distributed among the divine Persons. Indeed, it's not even clear that such a distribution of power is consistent with divinity.[64] But there is no indication of there being tasks which the Father and Holy Spirit can't do, but the Son can, and these other tasks which the Father and Son can't do, but the Holy Spirit can. Indeed, it is fairly commonly thought that orthodoxy entails that each Person be omnicompetent. I suppose if the other answers to Question 4 were deeply problematic that one might claim that we are forced to accept unique jobs for the Persons of the Trinity. But I don't think that they are.

Answer 4.4 is that of Arius. Arius thought that the Son and the Holy Spirit were subordinate to God the Father. As noted above, this is a view contrary to orthodoxy that is rebutted in the classic creeds of the Christian faith. I note it in the list of answers to Question 4 for the sake of clarity of exposition of logical space.

---

[62]See Wierenga, *Nature of God*, for an excellent one-volume overview of analyses of the divine attributes.

[63]This is subject to the usual handwaving sorts of qualifications with respect to compossibility—it's possible that I only ever own exactly one car, and it's possible that I only ever own only exactly two cars, but these obviously aren't compossible. The standard account of this type of analysis of omnipotence (see Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, and Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power") indexes omnipotence to a time and involves the history of the world of evaluation up to that time to get around these sorts of worries.

[64]As Mark Murphy pointed out to me. One might be tempted to think, though, that some knowledge is distributed in this sort of way: perhaps some experiential knowledge of the sort the Son acquired when he was incarnated is necessary for omniscience. Assume there is some knowledge that is essentially first-person experiential: one can't have it unless one has the relevant experiences. So God doesn't know what it's like to suffer without suffering, and having this knowledge is necessary for omniscience. There is a great deal of other first-person knowledge God never will have: struggling with and then falling into sin, recovering from a marathon, etc. It is difficult to see why this first-person knowledge also wouldn't be necessary for omniscience if knowledge of suffering is. Furthermore, if the Godhead is a temporal entity, it seems to imply that the Son wasn't omniscient until the time of incarnation. So I think it's best not to think of knowledge of suffering as necessary for omniscience.

I take it then that the two plausible answers for the orthodox Christian are Answer 2.4 and Answer 3.4. Which is preferable? As before, I think that answers to earlier Questions will drive decisions here. Suppose one thinks that the Godhead is a separate instance of divinity with a separate mental life from that of the three Persons. Then one is more likely to find a view on which the Godhead is among the omnicompetent beings plausible. If, on the other hand, one thinks that "God" isn't a singular referring term, then it is much easier to see how the Godhead isn't itself omnicompetent. Or, suppose one thinks that "God" is a referring term, and it picks out an entity that has no separate mental life (*pace* Answer 2.3). If one thought this, one's conception of God would be quite deflationary. This would seem to provide space to say that God isn't omnicompetent. I myself think that God ought to be counted along with the divine Persons as omnicompetent. I think this mainly as a result of finding the deflationary conception of "God" suggested by Answer 1.3 to be unpalatable. Regardless, once one thinks of God as separate entity with a separate mental life, it may seem natural to think of God also as omnicompetent.

Question 5: How Are the Persons of the Trinity Individuated?

Answer 1.5: There is nothing that individuates the Persons of the Trinity; their individuation is a brute matter.

Answer 2.5: The Persons of the Trinity are individuated by a bare particular.

Answer 3.5: The Persons of the Trinity are individuated by haecceities.

Answer 4.5: The Persons of the Trinity are individuated by non-mental qualitative properties.

Answer 5.5: The Persons of the Trinity are individuated by multiple relations and Filoque (double-procession).[65]

Answer 6.5: The Persons of the Trinity are individuated by multiple relations alone.[66]

Answer 7.5: The Persons of the Trinity are individuated by the (qualitative) contents of their minds.[67]

What makes it the case that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct? Initially, the question might seem puzzling, as distinctness is necessary. So if the Father is distinct from the Son, the Father is necessarily distinct from

---

[65]This is the view of both Aquinas and Swinburne.

[66]This is Scotus's view.

[67]I limit the contents to the qualitative because things like *de se* thoughts will involve grasping of one's own haecceity, or oneself directly, depending on how one thinks of the semantics of *de se* thoughts. Then, *de se* thoughts would individuate via haecceities (Answer 3.5) or individuation would be brute (Answer 1.5). Comments from Robert McKim convinced me I should include this Answer.

the Son. If we take two objects, x and y, and ask what makes them distinct, the following might seem to be a good first shot at an answer: they are two. Therefore they are not one. Therefore they are distinct, and indeed, necessarily so. Similarly, if we ask what makes the three Persons of the Trinity distinct, one might answer: they are three. Therefore, they are not one. Therefore, they are distinct, and indeed, necessarily so. In this frame of mind, Answer 1.5 might seem appealing: distinctness isn't a candidate for being explained.

On the other hand, we do think that distinctness can (non-trivially) supervene on other facts. Consider debates in personal identity. Some people believe that it follows from the fact that Person P_1 and Person P_2 share very little in the way of psychological states that P_1 and P_2 are distinct. Now, presumably if P_1 and P_2 are distinct, then they are necessarily so. Yet we may seek the grounds for this distinctness. So I think we're warranted in trying to give some sort of reductive answer to Question 5, even if we ultimately decide that we can't and that we need to adopt Answer 1.5.

What about Answer 2.5? By a bare particular, I have in mind something like Lockean substratum, or Bergmann's "bare particular,"[68] or Armstrong's "thin particular."[69] This is an entity that is concrete and particular but doesn't itself have any properties. Its purpose is two-fold. First, properties are supposed to inhere in it; it is suppose to undergird or hold properties. Second, it is supposed to individuate entities. What makes it the case that *this* thing is distinct from *that* thing, where each has all the same qualitative properties, is that they have different bare particulars.

I don't think that this is a very good answer to Question 5, as the notion of a bare particular is deeply suspect. First, I think that the enterprise whereby one ends with a bare particular is problematic. It goes something like this: think of qualities like pins in a pincushion. You strip away the pins one-by-one, and then you are left with the thing that holds the pins. The pins have to be held together in place by something. The bare particular is analogous to the pincushion. But suppose you think of properties in the way van Inwagen[70] does. Then what is there in space isn't a collection of qualities. It's a bunch of quarks and electrons that compose larger things (atoms and molecules and pages and such). The shape of the book isn't located there in space where the book is; it's an abstract object with no spatial location. So the picture of the qualities collected together in space is fundamentally misguided from the start, I think.

Second, the notion of a bare particular as something without qualities is of dubious plausibility. This worry goes all the way back to Berkeley (and perhaps Locke!), of course. It seems obvious that necessarily, anything that exists exemplifies properties. Theodore Sider suggests that we should think of the bare particular itself as exemplifying the properties

---

[68]Bergmann, *Realism.*

[69]Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs.*

[70]Van Inwagen, *Existence.*

of the book.[71] So the bare particular is black with writing on one cover and a picture on the other, and so on. But then the bare particular has all the properties of a book—are we to identify the bare particular with the book? Suppose we don't, then we've two book-like entities on our hands: the book and the bare particular. (Again, this is presaged in Berkeley, who saddled Locke with infinitely many extended substances where any object is supposed to be.) Suppose then we do identify the bare particular with the book; now we're back where we started with qualities being collected together in spacetime, and we can imagine stripping them away one-by-one, and we get to the last one, and there must be something left over.[72]

Third, it's difficult to see what a bare particular would be in the case of the divine Persons. One can (sort of) imagine how bare particulars are supposed to work in the case of concrete material objects. There is something located where each material object is located (though it has no properties!) that undergirds the object's properties. But the Persons of the Trinity are not spatially-located material objects. One might think that the fact that bare particulars have no properties help with this sort of objection. However, I think that this is so only in the sense that it can be difficult to see how something of dubious coherence is inconsistent with other propositions.

I don't think that bare particulars are the way for the orthodox Trinitarian to go. Philosophically, they are problematic; and in the case of the Trinity, we seek to eliminate rather than add difficulties with our metaphysics.

What about Answer 3.5? Suppose one thinks that properties are the semantic contents of meaningful predicates. This is a natural view for someone who thinks that propositions are structured entities to adopt. Predicates like "is Socrates" or "is identical with Socrates" are meaningful. So one is led naturally to the existence of haecceities, properties like *being Socrates* or *being identical with Socrates*. Or, one might think that haecceities are needed for individuation in Max Black-style twin-sphere cases.[73] It is natural to think that if some things possibly have haecceities, then, necessarily all things have them. (If haecceities are possible sorts of entities, how could anything fail to exemplify them?) If one thinks that there are haecceities, then one might think there is a ready way to explain what makes it the case that the Father, Son, and Holy Sprit are distinct. The Father exemplifies *being the Father*, the Son and Holy Spirit don't exemplify *being the Father*. The Son exemplifies *being the Son*, and the Father and Holy Spirit don't exemplify *being the Son*. The Holy Spirit exemplifies *being the Holy Spirit*, and the Father and Son don't exemplify *being the Holy Spirit*.

---

[71]Sider, "Bare Particulars."

[72]I assume here that this picture will be accepted by the bare particular theorist.

[73]See Adams, "Primitive Thisness." There are, of course, other reasons for thinking there are haecceities. See Rosencrantz, *Haecceity* for discussion.

Richard Swinburne argues that using hacceities to individuate the Persons of the Trinity generates philosophical difficulties. I quote him at length:

> But now there is a problem which arises if divine individuals have thisness [haccceities]. I shall consider shortly how it can be that there is overriding reason to bring about another divine individual. But if there is such a reason, and if divine individuals have thisness, then there has to be an overriding reason to bring about *this* second divine individual rather than any other one. For only if there was, would the individual be a metaphysically necessary being. If it was equally good for the first divine individual to bring about this second individual or that, then bringing about this one rather than that one would be an act of will rather than an act of essence so the individual brought about would not have the same metaphysical necessity of the first individual. But a reason for bringing about this individual rather than that one would consist in one having an essential property that the other lacked. Yet if divine individuals have thisness, there will always be possible divine individuals which have the same essential properties (those essential to divinity and any further individuating properties) and so no reason for bringing about one rather than another. . . . [H]owever many divine individuals were caused to exist . . . there would still be infinitely more which could be caused to exist. If divine individuals have thisness, there cannot be reason to bring about one rather than another. Hence if divine individuals have thisness, there can be only one of them.[74]

I take it the argument is something like this. If the Persons have haecceities, then (necessarily) there are infinitely many natures that are just like the natures of the actual Persons, but that differ only in haecceities. Furthermore, there is no reason (which would be a necessary truth) that would make it the case that across all possible worlds the Father causes the natures of the Son and the Holy Spirit (call them SON and HOLY SPIRIT) to be exemplified, rather than natures that are just like SON and HOLY SPIRIT except that they involve different haecceities. Thus, it would not be a necessary truth that SON and HOLY SPIRIT are (uniquely) exemplified.[75] But it is a necessary truth that SON and HOLY SPIRIT are (uniquely) exemplified. So the Persons don't have haecceities.

This is a really interesting argument, but I don't think it should worry the defender of those who believe in haeccieties.[76] First, one should note that presumably if it's possible for some entities to have a haecceity, then necessarily all objects (including the divine Persons) have them. Arguments for haeccieties seem to show that having them is necessary for being a thing that exists. So *prima facie* an argument against the divine

---

[74]Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 176.

[75]I'm assuming here that necessarily the Father generates at most one Second Person (read "Second Person" as a nonrigid "title") and at most one Third Person (also read as a title).

[76]I will assume in the subsequent discussion that the Father causes the other two Persons of the Trinity to exist. One of course might take denying that to be a lesson of Swinburne's argument.

Persons having haecceities would tell against anything having them.[77] I am inclined to accept arguments for the necessity of haeccieties, and thus *prima facie* would prefer to find fault with Swinburne's argument that the divine Persons don't have haecceities.

Second, haecceities aren't necessary to generate the worry in the argument. That is, Swinburne's avoiding haecceities doesn't get him off the hook, as it could be that there are brute differences between natures that don't involve haecceities. In particular—if Swinburne's reasoning is correct—there could be a distinct nature just like SON (call it SON*) whose non-identity with SON is brute, and which is otherwise just like SON. Then one would have the same sort of worry that Swinburne raised, but sans haecceities. So I think that haecceities are orthogonal to the main concern Swinburne is raising. That is, it's not the presence of haecceities that generates the problem here.

Third, I think that there is something wrong with Swinburne's argument. In particular, one might ask why we should think that, if the divine Persons have haecceities, there are various distinct (that are such that if exemplified, would result in distinct Persons) divine person-natures that differ only in haecceities involved (or that differ and whose difference is completely brute).[78] I see no reason for thinking that there are such actual properties, and we have no argument for their existence from Swinburne. Why should we think that there are natures that are possibly instantiated and if instantiated would yield a being just like the Son or Holy Spirit, but numerically distinct from them? To put it another way, it seems plausible to say that the essential properties of the Son or Holy Spirit, apart from each's haecceity, are individual essences of the Son and Holy Spirit.[79]

I'm inclined to think that this is the strongest rebuttal to Swinburne. But there is another. Suppose there are various natures that differ only from the natures of the Son and Holy Spirit in terms of haecceity. Perhaps it's a brute metaphysical necessity that the Father causes SON and HOLY SPIRIT to be exemplified. "But surely," one might object, "if there are natures just like SON and HOLY SPIRIT that differ only in haecceities involved, then there are worlds in which the Father causes them to be exemplified, rather than SON or HOLY SPIRIT." Perhaps not. Perhaps it's metaphysically (though obviously not logically) impossible that any of these other divine natures be exemplified, just as it's metaphysically (though not logically) impossible that hydrogen have more than one proton in its nucleus. So it would be a brute necessary truth that only particular divine natures (SON and HOLY SPIRIT) are exemplified.

---

[77]See Rosencrantz, *Haecceity* for discussion of arguments that necessarily all things have them.

[78]I will ignore different conjunctive and disjunctive properties that will arise from having different haecceities as one of the disjuncts or conjuncts.

[79]See Plantinga, *Essays*, for discussion of individual essences.

So I think there are two sorts of rebuttals that may be given to Swinburne's argument, one stronger than the other. Haecceities are an attractive prospect for answering Question 5. It is natural to believe in them already, and they do the work of individuating the Persons of the Trinity nicely.

What about Answer 4.5? To see how this might work, start with this sort of answer with respect to individuating objects in the case of material objects. If one accepted the identity of indiscernibles in its qualitative form, one would insist that each x and y such that x ≠ y, x has some qualitative property that y lacks. So if x and y are leaves that are of the same size and shape, it might be that x has a different shade of brown than y does.[80] But it's difficult to see how non-relational qualitative properties might individuate the Persons of the Trinity. Each of the Persons of the Trinity share many if not all qualitative properties. One might say that the Son has the property *experiences at some time physical suffering*, and the other two Persons don't. But that wouldn't help with the Father and Holy Spirit, and also wouldn't help on the plausible assumption that it's not necessary that the Son be incarnated. One might also try properties like *being the First Person of the Trinity*. But it's not clear that these aren't relational, nor is it clear if they aren't relational that they are qualitative. (So one might think, plausibly, *being the First Person of the Trinity* and *being God the Father* are the same property.) If we're going to try to ground individuation among the Persons of the Trinity in the qualitative, it's best to look at relations.

Answer 5.5 famously is Aquinas's answer.[81] The Persons are individuated by a combination of different procession relations and the Holy Spirit's proceeding from both the Father and the Son. The Father bears the relation of paternity to the Son and spiration to the Holy Spirit. The Son bears the relation of filiation to the Father, and the Holy Spirit bears the relation of procession to the Father. These relations are, Aquinas says, sufficient for distinguishing the Father from the Son and the Father from the Holy Spirit, as these relations are irreflexive. The distinction between the Son and Holy Spirit doesn't follow from the instantiation of the above relations, however. The following is consistent: x bears paternity to y, x bears spiration to z, and y = z, says Aquinas. The only way to distinguish Son from Holy Spirit is through Filioque, or double procession. So the Son also bears the relation of spiration to the Holy Spirit. The following isn't consistent, says Aquinas: x bears paternity to y, x bears spiration to z, y bears spiration to z, and y = z (as spiration is irreflexive).

There is another answer in the neighborhood. Call the relation between the Father and Son 'R_1', and call the relation between the Father and Holy Spirit 'R_2.' Then stipulate that if $R_1(x,y)$ and $R_2(x,z)$, that y ≠ z. This is

---

[80]I set aside the issue of whether colors are relational.

[81]References to Aquinas in this section are from *Summa theologiae*, 1a, QQ. 27–29. I draw from Marshall, "The Deep Things of God" in this section. I believe it is also Swinburne's (*The Christian God*, 184 ff.) answer. I will focus, though, on Aquinas's well-developed account.

essentially Scotus's answer (Answer 6.5).[82] But isn't there something illegitimate about positing procession relations that will entail the distinctness of the Persons? I don't think so. These relations that are supposed to hold between the divine Persons are not well-understood relations outside of discussions of the Trinity. They function as terms of art, and may be thought of as relations that are "made to order."[83] So why can't it be that if x bears paternity to y and x bears spiration to z, that y ≠ z? Aquinas objects to something like Answer 6.5 in the following way. If the spiration and paternity relations were sufficient to individuate the Son from the Holy Spirit, then it would follow that the Father was self-distinct. But this is impossible, so Answer 6.5 can't work. Aquinas seems to think that if there are two relations R_1 and R_2 such that if $R_1(x,y)$ and $R_2(x,z)$ collectively entails y ≠ z, then (*per impossible*) x ≠ x. But something has gone wrong here. There's no reason whatever to think that there can't be relations which are such that if $R_1(x,y)$ and $R_2(x,z)$ then y ≠ z. Indeed, let R_1 = "is the father of" and R_2 = "is a child of." If x is the father of y, and x is a child of z, then y ≠ z.[84]

It would be nice to avoid a relational answer to Question 5 that didn't rest on double procession. This is a doctrine that has split Eastern and Western Christianity, and a view on which Eastern Christians aren't Trinitarians is troubling. Fortunately, I think that there is no reason to prefer Aquinas's answer to Scotus's. There is, however, a serious objection to both of these answers, and it must be rebutted. This objection is that (irreflexive) relations can't individuate, as these relations "presuppose" individuation.[85] If R(x,y) where R is an irreflexive relation, that x ≠ y is somehow prior to the fact that R(x,y), goes the objection. So the fact that R(x,y) can't be used to ground that x ≠ y. Let x and y be two spheres that are exactly alike in their categorical properties. x sits to the left of y. One might claim that we can argue that x ≠ y because x bears the *being to the left of* relation to y, and this relation is irreflexive. But, according to this objection, that x bears this relation to y can't ground the fact that x ≠ y, for the fact that x ≠ y is metaphysically prior to the instantiation of the relation in question.[86]

I quote from Allaire:

[L]et "L" stand for "to-the-left-of" . . . one may object at this point, maintaining that L *cannot* be exemplified by one thing. I agree. But we know that only because we know that things exemplifying L are at least numerically different. And our knowledge of that is primary. It does not depend on our

---

[82]Scotus, *Reportatio 1A*, Distinctions 11–12.

[83]Made to order within the confines of orthodoxy, of course. The relation between Father and Son can't be something like *is the first-grade teacher of*.

[84]Thanks to Tony Roy for providing the example.

[85]For discussion, see Allaire, "Bare Particulars," and "Another Look at Bare Particulars," as well as Meiland "Do Relations Individuate?"

[86]I take it the same objection will apply to relational properties. I presume it will be claimed that x's having the property *being to the left of y* isn't metaphysically prior to the fact that x ≠ y.

knowing that the things stand in different relations. That L is asymmetrical is factual, not logical.[87]

I don't think that this is a very good argument for the claim that relations can't individuate. It seems to confuse epistemic issues with metaphysical issues. Even if we "know first" that x ≠ y before we know L(x,y), nothing follows about which is metaphysically primary. Second, that L is asymmetrical is surely not factual, if what is meant here is contingent.[88] Surely it's necessary that L is asymmetrical. This argument doesn't touch the issue at hand.

It is difficult to find arguments that go beyond restatements of the position that diversity is metaphysically prior to standing in relations the exemplification of which entail diversity. However, suppose we think that some qualitative facts can ground facts about identity, as in the case of personal identity. Presumably, the same sort of worry about priority would surface here: "It can't be that P_1 and P_2's having different wholly psychologies grounds the distinctness of P_1 and P_2. Rather, their having wholly different psychologies presupposes distinctness (as Butler might say)." I don't think that this line of reasoning is very persuasive (if only because the metaphysical "order" here is difficult to determine), and I'm inclined to think the same in the case of relations differentiating. It may be that x and y's being distinct is somehow metaphysically prior to x's standing in an asymmetrical relation to y. But it's very difficult to see how to argue for this.

It might be thought that Answer 7.5 is a nonstarter, for purely psychological states aren't sufficient for numerical identity. We can see this if we note that God could create two human individuals who are qualitatively psychologically identical.[89] So their distinctness must lie in something other than their having the qualitative psychological makeups they do. But though this solution won't work in normal human cases of personal identity, it may well work in the divine case. Suppose one thinks that the divine Persons are metaphysically necessary beings. Someone who holds to ST will want to hold that each will have a different qualitative mental life. Then, as with the argument against Swinburne's case against divine haecceities, presumably there won't be a metaphysically possible being who has the same qualitiative mental states as each of the divine Persons. So the standard sort of counterexample against qualitative mental contents individuating persons wouldn't apply.

Where do we stand? Suppose one did find the line of reasoning that relations presuppose diversity convincing. Then there are options open to the proponent of ST. First, she might claim that qualitative mental states individuate the Persons of the Trinity. Second, there remains the option of

---

[87]Allaire "Bare Particulars," 19.

[88]As Meiland reads him ("Do Relations Individuate?").

[89]Suppose as well they bear the same relevant relations to the same (sort of) environment so that externalists about mental content will be satisfied.

individuating by haecceities. This is the route I would prefer, as it seems to me clear that necessarily, anything that exists has a haecceity; and necessarily, if x ≠ y, then necessarily x and y have different haecceities. Furthermore, if anything is able to do the work of individuating, haecceities are. So why not use the metaphysical machinery that already is available?

Conclusion

In this paper, I've tried to elucidate some of the logical space within ST. I've looked at answers to five questions the social Trinitarian should seek to answer. First, how do the three Persons of the Trinity relate to the Godhead? Second, how many divine beings or gods are there? Third, how many centers of consciousness are there in the Godhead? Fourth, how many omnicompetent beings are there? Fifth, how are the Persons of the Trinity individuated? There no doubt is much more logical space to investigate. But I hope I've made clear some of the choices that Social Trinitarians need to make, and some of what is involved in making each of the various choices.[90]

California State University, San Bernardino

References

Adams, Robert. 1979. "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity." *Journal of Philosophy* 76: 5–26. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2025812

Allaire, E. B. 1963. "Bare Particulars." *Philosophical Studies* 14: 1–8. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00396663

Allaire, E. B. 1965. "Another Look at Bare Particulars." *Philosophical Studies* 16: 16–21. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00398838

Aquinas, Thomas. 1981. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Burns, Oates and Washbourne).

Armstrong, David. 1997. *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge University Press). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511583308

Baker, Lynne. 1997. "Why Constitution is not Identity." *The Journal of Philosophy* 94: 599–621. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2564596

Baker, Lynne. 2000. *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge University Press). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173124

Baker, Lynne. 2009. *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism* (Cambridge University Press).

Bealer, George. 1982. *Quality and Concept* (Oxford University Press). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198244288.001.0001

Bergmann, Gustav. 1967. *Realism: A Critique of Brentano and Meinong* (University of Wisconsin Press).

Brower, Jeffrey, and Michael Rea. 2005. "Material Constitution and the Trinity." *Faith and Philosophy* 22: 487–505.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/faithphil200522134

Brown, David. 1985. *The Divine Trinity* (Open Court).

Craig, William L., and J. P. Moreland. 2003. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press Academic).

Flint, Thomas, and Alfred J. Freddoso. 1983. "Maximal Power." In *The Existence and Nature of God*, edited by Alfred J. Freddoso (University of Notre Dame Press).

Gregory of Nyssa. 1980. "On 'Not three gods'" (or *Ad Ablabium*). Reprinted in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, edited by William Rusch (Fortress Press).

Hasker, William. 2013. *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (Oxford University Press). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199681518.001.0001

Kelly, J. N. D. 1964. *The Athanasian Creed* (Harper and Row).

King, Jeffrey, Scott Soames, and Jeff Speaks. 2014. *New Thinking About Propositions* (Oxford University Press).
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199693764.001.0001

Layman, C. Stephen. 1988. "Tritheism and the Trinity." *Faith and Philosophy* 5: 291–298. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19885327

Layman, C. Stephen. Forthcoming. *Philosophical Reflections on the Atonement, Incarnation, and Trinity*.

Leftow, Brian. 1999. "Anti Social Trinitarianism." In *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, edited by Stephen Davis and Daniel Kendall (Oxford University Press), 203–249.

Leonard, Henry S., and Nelson Goodman. 1940. "The Calculus of Individuals and its Uses." *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 5: 45–55.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2266169

Marshall, Bruce D. 2011. "The Deep Things of God: Trinitarian Pneumatology." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, edited by Gilles Emery, O.P. and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

McCall, Thomas, and Michael Rea, eds. 2009. *Philosophical and Theological Essays on The Trinity* (Oxford University Press).
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199216215.001.0001

Meiland, J. W. 1966. "Do Relations Individuate?" *Philosophical Studies* 17: 65–69.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00398597

Moltmann, Jürgen. 1993. *Trinity and the Kingdom*. (Fortress Press).

Mosser, Carl. 2009. "Fully Social Trinitarianism." In *Philosophical and Theological Essays on The Trinity*, edited by Thomas McCall and Michael Rea (Oxford University Press), 131–150.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199216215.003.0008

Pettit, Philip. 2003. "Groups With Minds of Their Own." In *Socializing Metaphysics: The Nature of Social Reality*, edited by Schmitt (Rowman and Littlefield), 167–193.

Plantinga, Alvin. 1974. *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press).

Plantinga, Alvin. 1980. *Does God Have a Nature?* (Marquette University Press).

Plantinga, Alvin. 2003. *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*. Edited by Matthew Davidson (Oxford University Press).
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0195103769.001.0001

Plantinga, Cornelius Jr. 1989. "Social Trinity and Tritheism." In *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, edited by Oliver Crisp (T&T Clark).

Rosencrantz, Gary. 1993. *Haecceity: An Ontological Essay* (Springer).
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-8175-2

Schmitt, Frederick, ed. 2003. *Socializing Metaphysics: The Nature of Social Reality* (Rowman and Littlefield).

Scotus, John Duns. 2004. *An Examined Report of the Paris Lecture, Reportatio 1A*. Edited and translated by Allan B. Wolter and Oleg B. Bychkov (Franciscan Institute Publications).

Sider, Theodore. 2001. *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford University Press). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/019924443X.001.0001

Sider, Theodore. 2002. "Review of *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View*." *The Journal of Philosophy* 99: 45–48.

Sider, Theodore. 2006. "Bare Particulars." *Philosophical Perspectives* 20: 387–397.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2006.00112.x

Simons, Peter. 2000. *Parts: A Study in Ontology* (Oxford University Press).
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199241460.001.0001

Sosa, Ernest. 1987. "Subjects Among Other Things." *Philosophical Perspectives* 1: 155–187. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2214145

Sosa, Ernest. 1993. "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 90: 605–626. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2940814

Swinburne, Richard. 2007. *The Christian God* (Oxford University Press).

Thomson, J. J. 1998. "The Statue and the Clay." *Nous* 32: 149–173.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.00094

van Inwagen, Peter. 1990. *Material Beings* (Cornell University Press).

van Inwagen, Peter. 2014. *Existence: Essays in Ontology* (Oxford University Press).
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107111004

Wierenga, Edward. 1989. *The Nature of God* (Cornell University Press).

Wierenga, Edward. 2004. "Trinity and Polytheism." *Faith and Philosophy* 23: 281–294. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/faithphil200421324

Wiggins, David. 1967. *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity* (Blackwell).

Wiggins, David. 1968. "On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time." *Philosophical Review* 77: 90–95. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2183184

Wiggins, David. 2001. *Sameness and Substance Renewed* (Cambridge University Press). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612756

Yandell, Keith. 1994. "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting: Trinity and Consistency." *Religious Studies* 30: 201–217.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500001499

Zimmerman, Dean. 1995. "Theories of Masses and Problems of Constitution." *Philosophical Review* 104: 53–110. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2186012

Zimmerman, Dean. 2002. "Persons and Bodies: Constitution without Mereology?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64: 599–606.
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2002.tb00163.x