

4-1-2012

## Book Review: Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical And Systematic Theologians On The Metaphysics Of Trinitarian Theology

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### Recommended Citation

Tuggy, Dale (2012) "Book Review: Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical And Systematic Theologians On The Metaphysics Of Trinitarian Theology," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 2 , Article 10. Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol29/iss2/10>

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informativeness, and offers some informal discussion on how a theistic explanation might rise to the standard of success. Dawes concludes,

if on a number of the criteria we give the theist the benefit of the doubt, we cannot exclude the bare possibility that there might one day exist a successful theistic explanation. As things stand, for instance, proposed theistic explanations are not consistent with the rest of our knowledge. (144)

But, again, how so? Are the conclusions of theistic proofs excluded a priori from “our knowledge”? Do we know that the full range of a posteriori and a priori arguments for God’s existence fail to yield anything rising to the level of knowledge? Is non-inferential knowledge of God ruled out as well? As we’ve already noted, intentional theistic explanations do not conflict with naturalistic explanations in any obvious way; they do not conflict any more than explanations in terms of purposes for events conflict with explanations in terms of efficient causes for events. So we are left with no obvious way in which proposed theistic explanations are supposed to be inconsistent with what we know.

*Theism and Explanation* is undeniably a well-written and highly accessible book. Dawes’s approach to theories of explanation in general, and theistic explanation in particular, makes for easy reading. The tradeoff is that the details of his account of explanation, theistic and otherwise, lose some clarity and the discussion loses some depth. The tension between naturalistic and theistic explanations, for instance, is not obvious. And the motivation for offering a theistic explanation—which might have been found in some version of the principle of sufficient reason—is obscure. But for readers interested in an introduction to some of these important and complex issues, *Theism and Explanation* offers an easy way into the discussion.

*Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology*, by Thomas McCall. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010. Pp. 256. \$30 (paperback).

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This is a unique, stimulating and yet unsatisfying book which should be widely read. The answers to the questions in the title, respectively: (1) either a “social” or a constitution theory, (2) Richard Bauckham’s. McCall is a theologian well versed in analytic philosophy. This book attempts, with some success, to bridge the cultural, intellectual, and institutional divides between Christian philosophers and theologians. McCall notes that the book “will at points be less than satisfying to partisans in both camps” (8). In chapter 1, he nicely summarizes much recent positive work on Trinity theories by Christian philosophers, as well as some anti-“social”-theory arguments. In the next two chapters he sets out to correct the oversights and misunderstandings of various of these philosophers by endorsing

Richard Bauckham's thesis that the earliest Christians "understood [Jesus] to be included in the identity of the one God" (57). New Testament era Judaism was "strictly monotheistic," and yet Christians properly worshiped Jesus. In my view McCall is too confident that the New Testament supports all these claims. His treatment of the source material (56–72) is perfunctory, and will be unsatisfying to those familiar with competing interpretations. The last part of chapter 2 gives helpful expositions of what ancient Arianism and modalism really amounted to (as contrasted with the ways some philosophers have thrown around those heresy-terms).

In chapter 3 McCall rejects the apparent modalism of Barth and Rahner (87–89), and returns to the theories of chapter 1. Utilizing the fruits of chapter 2, McCall rebuts Leftow's charge that a "social" theory is "Arianism" (95–98). McCall admits that it is unclear how well this "social" approach coheres with the Western tradition, especially the "Athanasian" creed and theories of divine simplicity (98–103). He rejects relative identity theories because in his view they don't get us far enough from modalism and metaphysical antirealism, while he dubs the Rea and Brower "constitution" theory "promising" (109); in his view it faces no theological problems, but a few philosophical ones. He rejects Leftow's "Latin" theory on the grounds of unclarity, of misfit with the Bible, and that it likely cannot avoid modalism (111–121). In chapter 3 and later in the book, McCall defends what most would call a "social" theory; we'll return below to this positive thrust.

Chapter 4 sympathetically critiques theologian Robert Jenson's Trinity theory, founded on this *non sequitur* (in Jenson's words): "since the biblical God can truly be identified by narrative, his hypostatic being, his self-identity, is constituted in dramatic coherence" (132). Thus, "the one God is an event; history occurs not only in him but as his being" and "God is the event of the world's transformation by Jesus's love" (*ibid.*) McCall points out what is plausibly a confusion about identity underlying Jenson's project (132–155). Jensonians will want to take a close look at McCall's friendly suggestions for amending the theory.

Chapter 5 sympathetically critiques the theological font of much recent social-trinity theorizing, Jürgen Moltmann. McCall convincingly argues that Moltmann's doctrine of "perichoresis" (applied by him both to intra-Trinity relations, and to God-world relations) "either does 'not enough' or does 'too much'" (157)—that is, it doesn't do enough to show how the three divine persons amount to one god, and it amounts to a God-world relation that is too close. To help, McCall urges that there are two kinds of perichoresis—one for inter-Trinity relations, and the other for God-cosmos relations, which he defines (170, 172). This reader was unable to see how these constitute two species under any shared genus.

Chapter 6 enters the recent debate among evangelical theologians concerning whether or not the Son is eternally "subordinate to" the Father. This thesis, he argues, is either trivial or inconsistent with the credal claim that the two are *homoousias* (175–180). Further, proponents like

Grudem and Ware on unclear about which version they really want to defend (188). In the end McCall pleads that this issue be held separate from debates about the proper roles of women in church life.

Chapter 7 discusses Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas's claims that "nothing in existence is conceivable in itself . . . since even God exists thanks to an event of communion" (190); "there is no true being without communion" (191), and "love . . . is constitutive of his [God's] substance" (192). McCall discusses these startling claims under the banner "Being as Communion." They seem to entail that it is metaphysically impossible that there be only one thing, and that it is impossible for there to be a self not in a personal relationship with at least one other self. McCall might have demanded arguments to back these claims up, discussing *prima facie* counterexamples (respectively: God, a lifelong human hermit atheist—say, Christopher Hitchens raised by wolves).

McCall too is entranced by this picture of God as fundamentally an eternal, perfect, three-way friendship. Thus he accepts "Being as Communion" but argues that it is in conflict with another thesis to which Zizioulas is committed, what McCall dubs the "Sovereignty-Aseity Conviction." This is the claim that God and only God exists *a se*—independently, or solely through himself, everything else depending on him. In Zizioulas's view, only God—that is, the Father—exists *a se*, and he is radically free—not only creation, but even the existence of the Son and Spirit depend on his free choice. Thus, the Trinity exists contingently, and dependently on the Father (193, 196).

McCall argues that this ascription of aseity only to the Father amounts to an objectionable subordinationism. In his view, "Traditional affirmations of subordination have revolved around the 'function' of the Son" (198). He argues that Zizioulas should keep the "Being as Communion" thesis, as it is "central to the teaching of Scripture and the Christian tradition" (205). But he should ascribe aseity not to the Father alone, but rather to the Trinity, holding it to be implied by the property *divinity* (207). Further, the notion of aseity should be clarified—we should re-define it to mean a lack of dependence *on anything which is not divine* (209). Thus, both the Trinity and each of the Persons exist *a se*. But, preserving the "Being as Communion" theme, each person depends for his existence on the other two—existing as a person only because of their relation to another.

What happened to the patristic "generation" and "procession" claims, which seem to entail that the Son and Spirit both exist because of the Father? McCall's response is to redefine the sentence "the Father eternally generates the Son":

eternal generation refers us to (a) the incompleteness of the persons as individuals and (b) their complete and irreducible uniqueness in relation to the other persons. Seen this way, the doctrine of eternal generation emphasizes that to be a person—even a divine person—is to be incomplete "alone" or in oneself. (212–213)

Chapter 8 is McCall's manifesto for trinitarian theology, some "theses for scholastic disputation" (219). I highlight just a few: We should think critically about alleged social and political implications of trinitarian doctrine (225–227). Appeals to mystery cannot atone for doctrines which are "obviously inconsistent" (228); Trinity doctrines must be "coherent (or at least not obviously incoherent)" (229) as well as biblically and creedally kosher. But theologians "need not undertake to show *how* God is three and one. Indeed, to attempt to do so reeks of hubris" (232). This seems inconsistent with his friendliness towards any attempt to construct a coherent *metaphysical model* of the Trinity. Doesn't a response to the threeness-oneness problem entail an answer to the "how" question?

Another important assertion is that "*Christian* theological commitments should receive priority . . . if our intuitions about 'theism' and 'monotheism' conflict with the central elements of Trinitarian doctrine, then so much the worse for our intuitions about such things!" (233). It is hard to argue that if something is known to be divine revelation, it may be reasonably believed even if it conflicts with our prior commitments. But exactly what are these central elements?

McCall nowhere explicitly advances his preferred Trinity theory. But the outlines are clear enough. "The" Trinity theory, for McCall, involves three distinct "centers of consciousness and will" (12, 87–89, 236)—what I would call so many *selves*—capable of personal relationships with one another. Their status is absolutely (ontologically) equal, and each depends for his existence as a self on the others. These, in *some* sense, *are* the one, triune God. This "God" is not a self, though it is "truly personal" (93–94), and so it has personal properties—or at least, it has parts which do. (Misleadingly, but following other recent social theorists, McCall refers to it throughout using personal pronouns.) But are not three equally divine selves three gods? No, for it is only *Bauckham's* idea (which McCall agrees is also the first-century Jewish idea) of monotheism which is relevant and *Bauckham* thinks it (this special New Testament era "monotheism," the content of which is never spelled out) is consistent with trinitarian developments (233–236), we assume, even "social" ones.

Here most philosophers will balk; *Bauckham's* claim cries out for clarification. Is not Jesus portrayed in the New Testament as *someone other than* God, someone who prays to and depends on God, who does God's bidding? On the other hand, isn't Jesus supposed to be "God incarnate," God himself, in human form? Is God who Jesus is? *Bauckham* often writes as if God and Jesus are the same self. And yet, Jesus is in his words "included in the identity" of God, which *suggests* that they are not. He sometimes suggests that the Father is *also* so included. Through this cloudy lens, McCall would have us view the New Testament witness about God and Christ. But this claim, no less than speculative flights about *perichoresis*, is in need of careful analysis and evaluation. McCall himself, not holding God to be a self, won't say that God and Jesus are the same self. In what sense, then, is Jesus "in God's identity"?

McCall makes some excellent points about monotheism and the Trinity. It won't imply monotheism, he says, to say merely that there's one generic divine essence, that there's only one divine "family," that there's only one font of divinity (the Father), or that the Three are united by a mysterious relation of "periochosis" (241–242). Amen to all that.

My biggest criticism of the book is its friendliness towards theoretical solutions, which crucially depend on bold, arguably *ad hoc* re-definitions. Yet it is clearly written, sober, insightful, and rich with argument. As intended, it gives theologians and philosophers some important things to argue about *together*.

*Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 316. \$45 (paperback).

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This is an important and informative collection of essays that I expect will be highly influential, and which I highly recommend. However, reading these essays is somewhat frustrating. The frustration centers on a set of interrelated ambiguities that run throughout the collection. Some of these ambiguities are unavoidable, but others should be disambiguated and are not, at least not to the degree one might expect from an analytic treatment of analytic theology. In what follows, I focus on two concerns: just what constitutes analytic theology and whether analytic theology is meant to be only descriptive, or normative as well.

In the introduction, Michael Rea makes two important distinctions. First, while analytic theology is based on the methods of analytic philosophy, these methods are applied not to natural language analysis as in early analytic philosophy, but to metaphysical systems or worldviews. Second, to refer to the methods of analytic philosophy in contemporary usage is more about a particular style of philosophy with an associated set of desiderata—clarity, rigor, and logical argumentation being fundamental. As such, analytic theology can allow for much variety with respect to content and method. Analytic theology may be better thought of as an attitude toward theological methods as opposed to a way of doing theology.

The first two essays in part one are focused on the nature of analytic theology, but are less than direct in their conclusions concerning normativity. In "On Analytic Theology," Thomas Crisp uses a distinction by Peter Strawson between descriptive and revisionist metaphysics. Descriptive metaphysics seeks merely to understand the current status of a conceptual system. Revisionist metaphysics offers an alternative to the current system. Crisp envisions analytic theology as descriptive partly because it seeks to