

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

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Volume 27 | Issue 4

Article 2

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10-1-2010

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### Recommended Citation

Paasch, JT (2010) "Arius and Athanasius on the Production of God's Son," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 4 , Article 2.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201027441

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol27/iss4/2>

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# ARIUS AND ATHANASIUS ON THE PRODUCTION OF GOD'S SON

JT Paasch

Arius maintains that the Father must produce the Son without any pre-existing ingredients (*ex nihilo*) because no such ingredients are available to the Father. Athanasius denies this, insisting not only that the Father himself becomes an ingredient in the Son, but also that the Son inherits his divine properties from that ingredient. I argue, however, that it is difficult to explain exactly how the Son could inherit certain properties but not others from something he is not identical to, just as it is difficult to explain the precise way that a statue inherits certain properties but not others from the lump of bronze it is made from.

According to the doctrine of the Trinity, God is three persons: the Father, Son, and Spirit. However, two of these persons, namely the Son and Spirit, are produced. The Son's production is the simpler case, because everybody in Christendom agrees that the Son is produced by the Father alone. The Spirit's production is a little more complicated because some believe that the Spirit is produced by the Father alone, while others believe that the Spirit is produced by the Father and Son together. But either way, the point I want to highlight here is that some of the divine persons are *produced*. The question that interests me is this: how, exactly, does one divine person produce another? In this article, I want to look at two fourth-century attempts to explain how the Father produces the Son: that of Arius, and that of Athanasius.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In what follows, I will cite from the English translations of Arius's and Athanasius's works found in the widely available *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2 [henceforth = *NPNF* 2], volumes 2–4 (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890–1892). These translations are old, but they are generally reliable, and there is no need to refer to the Greek texts in an article such as this. Also, I should note that by selecting Arius and Athanasius, I do not mean to suggest that these are the two main 'driving figures' behind the fourth-century controversies about the Trinity. On the contrary, I choose Arius and Athanasius only because most of us have heard of them. Modern scholarship has argued, persuasively I think, that Arius and Athanasius are just two among many important voices in their day. For example, see the comments in Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. xvii–xxi; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 11–15; and Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), pp. 1–25. For a thorough survey of these fourth-century controversies, see the whole of Hanson's *The Search*.



As is well known, Arius was a priest in Alexandria during the early decades of the fourth century, and he preached that the Father creates the Son out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Arius's teaching was quickly absorbed in a controversy that was spreading all over the Eastern Roman Empire, and eventually the Council of Nicea met in 325 CE to settle the dispute.

For a variety of complicated reasons though, Nicea did not solve the problem, and debate continued throughout the remainder of the century. By the middle of the fourth century, Athanasius had emerged as one of the most outspoken opponents of Arius's teaching. According to Athanasius, the Son is not created out of nothing. Rather, he is begotten by the Father: God's Son is a real son, produced similarly to the way that human sons are begotten by their fathers.

In what follows, I hope to explicate the theories of Arius and Athanasius with as much philosophical precision as I can. These authors are not always consistent, and they frequently speak in rather vague ways, so the specific details of their claims are not always evident. Nevertheless, I will try to extract from each author as clear a theory as I can.

Now, certain specialists (and non-specialists) might find my approach inappropriate. They might suggest that I am taking these authors' words out of their historical context and subjecting them to overly literal philosophical analysis. After all, one might say, Arius and Athanasius were not twenty-first century analytic philosophers, so it is a mistake to focus on the philosophical issues in abstraction from the exegetical, liturgical, soteriological, and ecclesiological issues that concerned such patristic writers and their communities.

In my opinion, this is a valid and important concern, and I do not mean to suggest that philosophy is the only thing that matters here. But I do believe that grappling with the philosophical technicalities of patristic theology is an important part of understanding the bigger picture. Besides, I have limited space in an article like this, so I simply cannot discuss the views of Arius and Athanasius in all their historical detail. What follows should be understood merely as an attempt to deal with just one aspect—the philosophical aspect—of the trinitarian theology of Arius and Athanasius.<sup>2</sup>

One other comment is in order here. I do not believe that all patristic authors held generally similar, or perhaps even compatible, views about the Trinity. Thus, although a specialist might point out that the Cappadocians and Augustine (who lived after Athanasius) addressed some of the issues I discuss here, I am wary of importing those later ideas onto earlier writers like Arius and Athanasius. As I see it, Arius and Athanasius are still trying to work out problems that later writers may (or may not) have

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<sup>2</sup>Athanasius himself is not opposed to using arguments against the Arians. *Contra Arianos* [= CA], 1.10 (NPNF 2, 4: 312): "Therefore, since all that remains is to say that from the devil came their [viz., the Arians'] mania (for of such opinions he alone is sower), proceed we to resist him . . . that, the Lord aiding us, and the enemy, as he is wont, being overcome with arguments, they may be put to shame."

'solved,' so I will examine Arius and Athanasius in light of the philosophical problems *they* grappled with.

### *Creation*

As I said above, Arius maintains that the Son is created from nothing (*ex nihilo*), but Athanasius denies this. Much of the discussion depends on what these authors mean by creation. Before we go any further, it will be helpful to establish a working definition for 'creating something from nothing.' This requires some care, because we are after a definition that both Arius and Athanasius would agree to. But so long as we make the right qualifications, I think that Arius and Athanasius do agree on what it means to create something from nothing.

Just so we have a rough idea of what we are talking about, let me begin by describing creation in the following way: something is created from nothing if it is produced without any pre-existing ingredients. That is a very loose way of putting it, but it makes the basic idea clear enough. We know that things get produced with pre-existing ingredients all the time. Masons build walls with bricks and mortar, cavemen make charcoal with fire and wood, humans procreate with sperm and eggs, and so on. But none of that counts as creation. Something is created from nothing only when it is produced without any pre-existing ingredients. As I said though, that is a loose way of putting it, so let me explain more carefully what I mean.

(1) First then, let me clarify what I mean by an ingredient. Now, I admit that this term may suggest all sorts of things to a variety of readers. But I choose this label for lack of a better term, and other options seem even less helpful. For example, the word 'part' is far too narrow, and the word 'constituent' has taken on a wide variety of meanings in contemporary philosophical literature. So I will use 'ingredient' simply because it does not have the philosophical baggage that words like 'part' or 'constituent' have, and I hope that allows me the freedom to define the word in the following way.

When I talk about an 'ingredient' in a product, I mean any sort of entity which satisfies the following two conditions: (i) first, it exists *in* the product; and (ii) second, it bears its own properties—i.e., it has features that other ingredients in the product do not have, and which the product itself does not have. (I choose these two conditions because they are the conditions that both Arius and Athanasius need to make their theories work.)

As for the first condition, I do not have a good definition for what it means to be 'in' a product, but this first condition is meant to rule out anything the product is related to outside of itself. For instance, some believe that properties are abstract entities which exist somewhere 'out there,' and particular objects are related to those properties by exemplifying them. Such properties are not *in* the things that exemplify them, so they do not count as ingredients in my sense of the word. Properties (whatever they

are) only count as ingredients if they are actually *in* the product. (Thus, immanent universals and tropes might count as ingredients, depending on one's view.)

The second condition is meant to rule out any ingredient that is totally identical to another ingredient, or which is totally identical to the whole product. For example, sometimes philosophers talk about an 'improper part' as something that is identical to the whole. Such improper parts would not be ingredients in my sense of the word, for they are identical to the whole.

This also rules out theories where a constituent is totally identical in some way to what it constitutes. For instance, some hold that when a lump of bronze is shaped like a statue, the bronze *just is* the statue, even though it is possible that this particular lump of bronze might not have ended up being this particular statue.<sup>3</sup> On this reading, the bronze would not count as an ingredient in the statue, for the bronze just is (i.e., is identical to) the statue.

However, when I talk about ingredients that are not identical to other ingredients or to the whole product, I mean to rule out only absolute or total identity—i.e., the sort of identity where *x* and *y* are just the very same thing with all the very same properties. But I wish to allow weaker kinds of identity or sameness.

For instance, some entertain a kind of sameness where two things can be numerically the same, but not identical.<sup>4</sup> On this view, a statue and the bronze it is made from are numerically the same object, but they are not identical, in which case the bronze would count as an ingredient of the statue in my sense of the word. These sorts of lesser identity or sameness are allowed here. All that is ruled out are ingredients that are completely and absolutely identical to another ingredient or the whole product.<sup>5</sup> As I see it, if an ingredient is completely identical to another ingredient or the product, then it just is that ingredient or product, in which case there is no need to talk about it as if it were something distinct.

This allows a fairly wide range of entities to count as ingredients. Of course, a physical part, or any sort of proper part, counts as an ingredient.

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<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, Allan Gibbard, "Contingent Identity," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 4 (1975), pp. 187–221.

<sup>4</sup>For example, Michael Rea, "Sameness without Identity: An Aristotelian Solution to the Problem of Material Constitution," *Ratio* 11 (1998), pp. 316–328; Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, "Material Constitution and the Trinity," *Faith and Philosophy* 22 (2005), pp. 57–76; and Jeffrey Brower, "Abelard on The Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, ed. Jeffrey Brower and Kevin Guilfooy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 223–257. Lynne Rudder Baker also holds that constitution is a unity relation. See "Unity without Identity: A New Look at Material Constitution," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 23 (1999), pp. 144–165, and *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially pp. 27–58.

<sup>5</sup>Note that this blocks problems for the Trinity that arise from the transitivity of identity. If some ingredient were absolutely identical to the Father, and if that same ingredient were also absolutely identical to the Son, then by the transitivity of identity, the Father and Son would be identical to each other. Neither Arius nor Athanasius would allow that, as we shall see.

For example, the two sides of a pan each count as ingredients in the pan. They are not identical to each other or to the whole pan, and they each have their own features (as is clear when one side of the pan is hot and the other side is cool).

Constituents like Aristotle's matter and form also count as ingredients in whatever they jointly compose, provided that they are not identical to each other when they compose the object in question. For instance, the body and soul that make up Socrates would count as ingredients in Socrates, so long as they are in Socrates but are not identical to each other or to the whole body-soul composite.

(2) As for 'pre-existing,' I also acknowledge that this term has uncomfortable connotations, as I will indicate in a moment. But again, for lack of a better (or at least more economical) term, let me stipulate that I will use 'pre-existing' in the following sense: an ingredient is a pre-existing ingredient when it is not produced by the *productive act* that brings the product into being. So, for example, when a mason builds a brick wall, the mason causes the wall to come to exist, but not the bricks. The mason may have produced the bricks himself at some earlier time, in which case the mason is the producer of both the wall and the bricks, but since the mason produced the bricks by a different productive act, the bricks are pre-existing ingredients in my sense of the word.

Alternatively, someone else might have produced the bricks, but again, in that case they would also be produced by a different productive act. The bricks could even have been special eternal bricks that always existed and were never produced at all. But they would still be pre-existing ingredients in my sense of the word because they are not produced by the productive act that brings the wall into being, irrespective of time or producer.

Now, I should emphasize that I only use the term 'pre-existing' partly for lack of a better term (as I said), and partly because I think it readily brings to mind a rough idea of the kind of thing I mean. But the term might suggest that pre-existing ingredients must exist at some earlier point in time, and I do not mean to imply that. I mean to use 'pre-existing' in a sense that is neutral to any temporal reference. For our purposes here, a pre-existing ingredient can be an ingredient that does indeed exist before the product, but it can also be an ingredient that exists co-eternally with the product.

Further, the term 'pre-existing' might suggest that a pre-existing ingredient is a contingent ingredient which might not have existed at all (at least in some world). But I do not mean to imply that either. I mean to use 'pre-existing' with a sense that is modally neutral. Pre-existing ingredients can be contingent, or they can be necessary. By the same token, I do not mean to imply that a pre-existing ingredient must be capable of independent existence. For our purposes here, pre-existing ingredients include both ingredients that are separable, and ingredients that are inseparable, from the product in question.

With all that said, let me return to the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. Earlier, I said that something is created from nothing when it is produced without any pre-existing ingredients. Now that I have made the sense of these terms somewhat clearer, I can formulate a more precise definition of creation. A producer creates a product from nothing if and only if the producer causes the product itself and each of its ingredients to come into being by the same productive act. Thus:

CREATION:

- For any  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  creates  $y$  from nothing  
 by a productive act  $P \stackrel{\text{df}}{=}$   
 (i)  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist by  $P$ , and  
 (ii) for any ingredient  $F$  in  $y$ ,  
 $x$  causes  $F$  to exist by  $P$ .

On this definition then, something is created from nothing if it is produced *without any pre-existing ingredients*, and something is not created from nothing if it is produced *with at least one pre-existing ingredient* (in my sense of these terms).

I presume that this definition applies in an extended sense to cases where multiple producers work together to create something from nothing. Suppose, for example, that God the Father creates Socrates' body, and God the Son creates Socrates' soul. By my definition of creation, the Father alone does not create Socrates. He only creates Socrates' body. Likewise, the Son does not create Socrates either, for he only creates Socrates' soul. But taken as a single productive unit, the Father and Son jointly create Socrates from nothing.

Note also that by my definition of creation, an uncreated product cannot be absolutely and utterly simple. For in order to be uncreated, the product must have at least one pre-existing ingredient, and on my terms, an ingredient cannot be absolutely identical with whatever it belongs to. It can be absolutely non-identical, or it can be non-identical in some weaker sense, but it cannot be totally identical with the product. Thus, an uncreated product must have some ingredient that is distinct from the product in some way, so it cannot be totally simple.

This does not mean that an uncreated product cannot be simple in some weaker sense. After all, one could employ a weaker kind of identity or sameness and argue that although the product's ingredients are not totally identical, they nevertheless are the same in some way. And in that case, the product would not be composed of really distinct parts or constituents, so it would still be simple in some sense.

The point, though, is that an uncreated product cannot be totally produced, for in order to be uncreated, it must have at least one pre-existing ingredient. That is, there must be *something* in the product that does not come into being with the product itself. Otherwise, *all* of the product would come into being when it is produced, in which case the whole product would pop into existence, as it were, out of nothing.



With all of that in mind, I want to turn now to the disagreement between Arius and Athanasius. As I said above, Arius thinks the Father creates the Son out of nothing, but Athanasius denies this. Let me look at each of these views in turn.

### *Arius*

Very little of Arius's writings have survived, so it is hard to say with any certainty what the details of his position actually are. Apparently, he authored a poem (or maybe it was a hymn) called the *Thalia*, but only a few chunks are extant. Arius also wrote letters, three of which have survived in their entirety, and Arius makes his clearest statements about how the Father produces the Son in these letters.<sup>6</sup>

His position starts from the assumption that there is only one Unproduced Producer.<sup>7</sup> That is, however many beings there might be in the universe, only one of them is unproduced, and all of the others are produced by something else. I do not know why Arius believes this. Perhaps he knew of (or worked out himself) a philosophical argument for this conclusion,<sup>8</sup> or maybe he just wanted to be a good biblical monotheist. He does not say. All we know is that he was firmly committed to the idea of a single Unproduced Producer.

Still, Arius uses this idea in a particular way. He reasons that since there is only one Unproduced Producer, then for any two things, if one of them is not produced, then the other one must be produced. This goes for the Father and Son too: if one of them is not produced, then the other one must be. They cannot both be unproduced, and obviously the Father is the one who is not produced, so Arius concludes that the Son must be the one who is produced.<sup>9</sup>

We need to be careful about what this claim amounts to. It does not follow, for example, that the Son is a creature. Of course, Arius does believe

<sup>6</sup>The *Thalia* does say some things about the Son's production, but given the high degree of uncertainty that we have about the *Thalia* (see Hanson, *The Search*, pp. 10–15), I will focus my attention on Arius's letters.

<sup>7</sup>Arius, *Letter to Alexander* [= LA] (NPNF 2, 4: 458): "We acknowledge One God [viz., the Father], alone Ingenerate, alone Everlasting, alone Unbegun"; *ibid.*, "God [viz., the Father], being the cause of all things, is Unbegun and altogether Sole"; *ibid.*, "but God is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all."

<sup>8</sup>Exactly how much philosophy Arius knew is a difficult question, but arguments for a single Unproduced Producer were certainly floating around at the time (e.g., neoplatonic arguments for the One), and I see no reason why Arius would not have known about some of these arguments. For Plotinus's argument that there is only one principle of all, see e.g., Lloyd Gerson, *Plotinus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 3–14, but see also Gerson's comments on page 4 about how Plotinus's argument is part of an older tradition.

<sup>9</sup>Arius, *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): "but God [viz., the Father] is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all. Wherefore also He is before the Son . . . as from God, He [viz., the Son] has being . . . in such sense is God his origin"; *Letter to Eusebius* [= LE] (NPNF 2, 3: 41): "But what we say and believe, and have taught, and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten"; *ibid.*, "He [viz., Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria at the time] has driven us out of the city as atheists, because we do not concur in what he publicly preaches, namely, God always, the Son always; as the Father so the Son; the Son co-exists unbegotten with God."



that the Son is created (as we shall see), but it takes a few more steps to get to that conclusion. At this point in the argument, I see no reason to think that the fact that the Son is produced necessarily entails that the Son is also a creature.

Nor does it follow that the Son comes to exist at some particular point in time.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, throughout history, various philosophers have believed that some productions are eternal. For instance, Christians believe the Son and Spirit are produced eternally, medieval Muslims like Avicenna believe creation is eternal, and so on.<sup>11</sup> I take it, then, that the fact that something is produced does not necessarily entail that it is produced at some point in time.

Now, Arius sometimes says things like “before he was begotten, the Son did not exist.”<sup>12</sup> That certainly makes it sound as if Arius thinks the Son began to exist at some point in time, and indeed, many of his contemporaries thought he meant just that. So there is no doubt that this kind of language is part of what got Arius into trouble.

But Arius sometimes qualifies these sorts of claims by pointing out that (as I read him) all he means is that the Son is produced.<sup>13</sup> And I think this suggests that what Arius may have been trying to say is simply that the Son does not exist *apart* from his production. It very well may be that Arius just could not find a way of making this point without resorting to temporal language.

Besides, Arius often says that the Son was produced “before the ages.”<sup>14</sup> And by that, I do not think Arius is saying that the Son was produced, say, five minutes before the rest of creation. I think he means to say, as in fact he does say more than once, that the Son was produced outside of or apart

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<sup>10</sup>Athanasius too distinguishes between time and production, for he claims that a product or offspring can be eternal. *CA*, 1.14 (NPNF 2, 4: 314): “When these points are thus proved, their [viz., the Arians’] profaneness goes further. ‘If there never was, when the Son was not’, say they, ‘but [yet] He is eternal, and coexists with the Father, [then] you [would have to] call Him no more the Father’s Son, but brother’. . . . For if we said only that He was eternally with the Father, and not His Son, their pretended scruple would have some plausibility; but if, while we say that He is eternal, we also confess Him to be Son from the Father, how can He that is begotten be considered brother of Him who begets?”

<sup>11</sup>For more details on the Arabic tradition, see Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup>Arius, *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): “[the Son] was not [in existence] before His generation.”

<sup>13</sup>For example, in *LE* (NPNF 2, 3: 41), Arius claims that “before He [viz., the Son] was begotten. . . . He was not. For He was not unbegotten.” Note that after saying the Son did not exist before he was begotten, Arius qualifies this by saying “For He was not unbegotten.” I take this to mean that despite the temporal language, Arius is trying to say that the Son does not exist *apart* from being begotten.

<sup>14</sup>Arius, *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): “We acknowledge One God [viz., the Father] . . . who begat an Only-begotten Son before eternal times”; *ibid.*, “but, as we say, at the will of God, [the Son was] created before times and before ages”; *ibid.*, “the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and founded before ages”; *LE* (NPNF 2, 3: 41): “He [viz., the Son] has subsisted before time, and before ages”; *Letter to Constantine* (NPNF 2, 2: 28): “Christ his Son, who was begotten of him before all ages.”

from time.<sup>15</sup> This suggests, to me at least, that Arius may have believed that the Son is timeless.

Thus, when Arius says that the Son is produced and the Father is not, I think that is *all* he is trying to say at this point in the argument; the temporal and/or creaturely character of the Son has not yet entered the picture. The claim, then, is only that the Son is produced: he somehow gets his being from the Father, while the Father is not produced at all.<sup>16</sup>

This is a totally uncontroversial claim. All orthodox Christians maintain that the Father and Son are not two independent Gods up in heaven. As the Creeds say, the Father begets the Son, so there is nothing controversial about saying that the Son is produced by the Father in some way or other.

The controversial stuff shows up when Arius tries to explain *how* the Son is produced. As Arius sees it, if the Father produced the Son with any pre-existing ingredients, he would either have to use created ingredients, or he would have to use some ingredient taken from within himself (those are the only two options). But Arius thinks neither of these are open to the Father.

The Father could not, for instance, produce the Son with any created ingredients, because the Son is produced 'before' anything else. We might recall a Bible verse on Arius's behalf: the Son is the "firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15), so when it comes time to produce the Son, so to speak, there simply isn't anything lying around that the Father could use.<sup>17</sup>

But the Father could not use any of his own ingredients to produce the Son either, for Arius believes that the Father is utterly simple. That is, the Father does not have any ingredients, so he cannot be broken down or analyzed into anything more fundamental. The Father is just one, indivisible thing.

By way of contrast, consider something that does have distinct ingredients. A pan, for example, can be hot on one side, and it can be cool on the other side. But this is only because the pan has different parts that can have their own features. If a pan were utterly simple (as the Father is), the whole thing would have to be hot, or the whole thing would have to be cold. It could not be partly hot or partly cold.

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<sup>15</sup>Arius, *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): "but [the Son] being begotten apart from time before all things." See also the same phrasing quoted in the previous note.

<sup>16</sup>Arius makes this point negatively by insisting that the Son is *not* unbegotten, but to put it positively, the point is that the Son *is* begotten or produced. *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): "For He [viz., the Son] is not eternal or co-eternal or co-unoriginate with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father, as some speak of relations, introducing two ingenerate beginnings"; *LE* (NPNF 2, 3: 41): "Some of them [viz., heretics] say that the Son is . . . also unbegotten [like the Father]. These are impieties to which we cannot listen"; *ibid.*, "We are persecuted, because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God [viz., the Father] is without beginning."

<sup>17</sup>Arius, *LE* (NPNF 2, 3: 41): "He [viz., the Son] is [produced] of the non-existent" (or, to put it more straightforwardly, "the Son is produced from what is not," or even better, "the Son is not produced from anything in existence"); *ibid.*, "He [viz., the Son] does not derive His subsistence from any matter."

This highlights what it means for the Father to be utterly simple in the sense that he does not have any ingredients: anything in the Father is, strictly speaking, completely identical to the Father. We cannot say that one portion of the Father has some feature that another portion, or the Father himself, does not have. Any feature that can be found in the Father belongs simply to the Father himself, not to some part or portion or ingredient in the Father.

This is very important for our whole discussion. Arius believes, of course, that the Father is God, but since the Father is utterly simple, then whatever it is that makes the Father God (and let me just call it the Godhood), it cannot be an ingredient in the Father. Rather, it must be absolutely *identical* to the Father. According to Arius then, the Father just is God.

This also means, so far as Arius is concerned, that the Father cannot break off a part of himself and use it as an ingredient in the Son. The Father has no ingredients, so he simply cannot produce the Son with some ingredient taken from within himself.<sup>18</sup> But that exhausts all the options, so Arius concludes that the Father therefore has to produce the Son without any pre-existing ingredients whatsoever. And according to the definition of creation I gave above, that means the Son is created from nothing.<sup>19</sup>

Now, one might think that Arius has overlooked an obvious option, namely that the Father *himself* could be an ingredient in the Son. I do not know why Arius never discussed this possibility. Perhaps he did and that text has not survived, or perhaps he just rejected it because he thought it would make the Son complex rather than simple. But whatever the case, we will see in the next section that Athanasius focuses on this very point and uses it to his advantage.

#### *Athanasius*

Athanasius denies that the Son is created from nothing. As he sees it, the Son is begotten, and here, begetting (or generating, as it is also called) is a technical term for the natural process of procreation, as when living organisms produce offspring. For Athanasius, the Son really is a son: he is the natural offspring of the Father.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Arius, *LE* (NPNF 2, 3: 41), "the Son is not . . . in any way part of the unbegotten [Father]"; *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): "nor [is it true] as Manichaeus taught that the offspring was a portion of the Father"; *ibid.*, "But if the terms 'from him' [Rom. 11:36], and 'from the womb' [Ps. 110:3], and 'I came from the Father, and I am come' [John 16:28], be understood by some to mean as if a part of Him [viz., the Father] . . . then the Father is according to them compounded and divisible," and Arius clearly thinks it would be absurd for God the Father to be divisible.

<sup>19</sup>Arius, *LE* (NPNF 2, 3: 41): "We are persecuted . . . [for saying that the Son is not produced from anything in existence]. And this we say, because He [viz., the Son] is neither part of God [viz., the Father], nor of any essential being [viz., anything else in existence]."

<sup>20</sup>Athanasius often distinguishes between adopted sons and natural sons, and he always insists that God's Son is a natural son, not an adopted son. *De Decretis* [= *DD*], 6 (NPNF 2, 4: 154): "Now it may serve to . . . ask . . . what in fact a son is. . . . In truth, Divine Scripture acquaints us with a double sense of this word:—one which Moses sets before us in the Law [viz., being a son by adoption] . . . —and the other sense, that in which Isaac is son of Abraham, and Jacob of Isaac. . . . If in the first, which belongs to those who gain the name [son] by

Athanasius does not, so far as I know, ever explain exactly how he understands the process of procreation, but I think we can extract the general picture from three of his comments. The first statement I want to highlight appears at a point where Athanasius is trying to explain why human fathers can sire many children rather than one. There, he says human fathers beget by losing a part of their substance, but they can regain what they have lost by eating some food, and for that reason, men can sire many children over time.<sup>21</sup>

Apparently, Athanasius believes that once a man has impregnated a woman (or women) enough times, he cannot do it again until he has had a good meal. When a man gives up his seed, he is, in effect, giving up a part of his substance, so he can only give up his seed so many times before he is running on empty, as it were. But when food is broken down and processed in the body, it replenishes the portion of substance he has lost, at which point he can give up his seed again.

I do not know what Athanasius means here when he talks about a father's 'substance.' The Greek word he uses is *ousia*, and that of course is a very vague term. Maybe Athanasius has something material in mind; after all, he says it can be replenished by food. On the other hand, maybe he is thinking it is an individualized human nature that gets repeated in each child. But these are just guesses. Athanasius does not, to my knowledge, ever say just what he means here, so I am going to retain the ambiguity of *ousia* by continuing to use the equally vague English term 'substance.'<sup>22</sup>

In any case, the point to glean from this is that for Athanasius, fathers give a part of their substance to their children, and their children spring forth from or grow out of that portion of their father's substance. To capture this idea, Athanasius often uses the metaphor of light radiating out of the sun, or water flowing out of a fountain: a son 'comes out of' or 'is produced from' his father's substance.<sup>23</sup>

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grace from moral improvement, . . . then He [viz., God's Son] would seem to differ from us in nothing; no, nor would He be Only-begotten, as having obtained the title of Son as others from His virtue"; CA, 1.8 (NPNF 2, 4: 310): "and how shall he not err . . . who is simply ignorant of the Son's genuine and true generation from the Father?"; *ibid.*, 1.16 (NPNF 2, 4: 316): "He [viz., the Son] is His [the Father's] proper offspring from His [the Father's] essence"; *ibid.*, 2.72 (NPNF 2, 4: 388): "the Word of God is not a creature but true Son, and by nature genuine, of the Father."

<sup>21</sup>Athanasius, *DD*, 11 (NPNF 2, 4: 157): "For the offspring of men are portions of their fathers, since the very nature of bodies is not uncompounded, but in a state of flux, and composed of parts; and men lose their substance in begetting, and again they gain substance from the accession of food. And on this account men in their time become fathers of many children."

<sup>22</sup>For a useful study of the concept of substance in Patristic theology, see Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), and "The Concept of Divine Substance," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975), pp. 1-14.

<sup>23</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.27 (NPNF 2, 4: 322): "[the Arians should] inquire of the sun concerning its radiance, and of the fountain concerning its issue. They will find that these, though offspring, always exist with those things from which they are"; *ibid.*, 1.14 (NPNF 2, 4: 315): "But if He is Son, . . . and [if] 'son' is nothing else than what is generated from the Father; . . . [then] what is to be said but that, in maintaining 'Once the Son was not', they [viz., the

The second comment to note about procreation is this: Athanasius often says that creatures and works of art are produced externally, while sons are produced internally. Works of art are produced 'externally' from other materials, and creatures are produced 'externally' from nothing at all. But sons are produced 'internally' from their father's substance.<sup>24</sup>

I think the point here is that the bit of substance a son gets from his father counts as a pre-existing ingredient (in my sense of the word). Thus, when a father gives his seed to a woman, that bit of his substance then becomes one of the ingredients that goes into forming a zygote in the mother's womb.<sup>25</sup> (Classical authors did not know about zygotes, of course, but I think we can extrapolate on their behalf.) That is why sons do not count as creatures. A son is produced with at least one pre-existing ingredient, namely a bit of his father's substance, so a son is not created from nothing.<sup>26</sup>

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Arians] . . . openly predicate of Him that . . . the Light was once without radiance, and the Fountain was once barren and dry?"; *DD*, 23 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 165): "Again, the illustration of the Light and the Radiance has this meaning. For the Saints have not said that the Word was related to God as fire kindled from the heat of the sun, which is commonly put out again, for this is an external work and a creature of its author, but they all preach of Him as Radiance, thereby to signify His being from the essence, [which is] proper and indivisible, and His oneness with the Father." Also, *CA*, 1.37 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 328): "For what is from another by nature, is a real offspring, as Isaac was to Abraham, . . . and the radiance to the sun"; *De Synodis* [= *DS*], 45 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 474): "the Bishops who anathematized the Arian heresy . . . acknowledging that the Word was not a creature, but an offspring from the essence, and that the Father's essence was the origin and root and fountain of the Son, and that he was . . . not of [a] different nature, as we are, and separate from the Father, but that, as being from Him, He exists as Son indivisible, as radiance is with respect to Light, . . . on these grounds [the Bishops] reasonably asserted . . . that the Son was Coessential [*homoousios*]."

<sup>24</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.29 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 323): "Let it be repeated then, that a work is external to the nature [of its producer], but a son is the proper offspring of the essence [of his father]"; *ibid.*, 2.57 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 379): "creatures are from without, and are works of the Maker; but the Offspring is not from without nor a work, but from the Father, and proper to His Essence. Wherefore, they are creatures; this God's Word and Only-begotten Son"; *ibid.*, 2.2 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 349): "[the term] Son implies something proper to Him and truly from . . . [the Father's] Essence; but what is from His will, comes into consistence from without"; *ibid.*, 2.3 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 349): "a son is confessed to be not external to his father but from him"; *ibid.*, 3.62 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 427): "A man by counsel builds a house, but by nature he begets a son; and what is in building began to come into being at will, and is external to the maker; but the son is proper offspring of the father's essence, and is not external to him"; *ibid.*, 1.26 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 322): "Those who ask of parents, and say, 'Had you a son before you begot him?' should add, 'And if you had a son, did you purchase him from without as a house or any other possession?' And then you would be answered, 'He is not from without, but from myself.'"

<sup>25</sup>Does Athanasius think the mother contributes any ingredients to the zygote? I have not found a place where he says either way. Athanasius generally does not speak very highly of women, and since he thinks God's Son is produced without a mother, he might think that mothers do nothing more than provide a zygote with shelter and nourishment in the womb. Origen and Tertullian seemed to think this (Stead, *Divine Substance*, p. 229), and I would not be surprised if Athanasius believed it too. But this is just a guess. It is also possible that Athanasius held some other theory of procreation that was common in his day, e.g., Aristotle's theory that the mother's menstrual material becomes the 'matter' of the zygote.

<sup>26</sup>I take it that this is Athanasius's point in the following passages. *CA*, 1.13 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 314): "it follows . . . that the Son did not come out of nothing, nor is in the number of originated things at all"; *ibid.*, 2.11 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 354): "the Son is not a work, but in Essence indeed the Father's offspring"; *ibid.*, 2.22 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 360): "how can He [viz., the Son] be Word

Third, Athanasius often says that when a father procreates, he produces something that is the same kind of thing as himself. Creators and artists, on the other hand, make things that are different in kind. And the reason is that sons come from their father's substance, while creatures and works of art do not.<sup>27</sup>

What I gather here is that however else we might want to characterize the bit of substance a human zygote gets from the father's seed, that bit of substance includes a *human nature*.<sup>28</sup> That is, it provides the zygote with all the properties it needs in order to be (or develop into) a member of human kind. Thus, human children quite literally get their human natures from their fathers.<sup>29</sup>

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and Wisdom, unless He be the proper offspring of His [viz., the Father's] essence, and did not come to be, as others, out of nothing?"; *ibid.*, 2.48 (NPNF 2, 4: 374): "no one says that He begets what He creates, nor calls His proper offspring creatures"; *ibid.*, 1.9 (NPNF 2, 4: 311): "[The Son is the] Very Son of the Father, natural and genuine, proper to His essence, . . . not a creature or work, but an offspring proper to the Father's essence"; *ibid.*, 2.5 (NPNF 2, 4: 351): "He is not in the number of works, nor in short of things originate, but the Offspring of the Father."

<sup>27</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 3.9 (NPNF 2, 4: 398): "For all other things subsisted out of nothing . . . and are greatly different in nature; but the Son Himself is natural and true Offspring from the Father"; *ibid.*, 3.13–14 (NPNF 2, 4: 401–402): "So also when the Son is beheld, so is the Father, for He is the Father's radiance; and thus the Father and the Son are one. But this is not so with . . . creatures; . . . for greatly, or rather wholly, do things by nature originate differ from God the Creator. . . . And the Word, as being not separate from the Father, nor unlike and foreign to the Father's Essence"; *ibid.*, 3.15 (NPNF 2, 4: 402): "For either they [viz., the Arians] will say that the Word is not God; or saying that He is God . . . but not proper to the Father's Essence, they will introduce many because of their [viz., the Father's and Son's] difference of kind. . . . But let this never even come into our mind. For there is but one form of Godhead, which is also in the Word"; *ibid.*, 3.20 (NPNF 2, 4: 405): "For like things are naturally one with like; thus all flesh is ranked together in kind; but the Word is unlike us and like the Father"; *ibid.*, 1.58 (NPNF 2, 4: 340): "therefore the Son is different in kind and different in essence from things originate, and on the contrary is proper to the Father's essence and one in nature with it."

<sup>28</sup>Or perhaps the bit of substance a father gives to his child *just is* an individualized human nature. But that is just a guess too, for it is not clear what either Arius or Athanasius think about the individuation of natures. They both talk about a father's 'substance' (*ousia*) getting divided up when he produces offspring, and if they take *ousia* to mean 'nature' (Aristotle's secondary substance) rather than an 'individual' (Aristotle's primary substance), then they may think that natures are divided by the individuals that exemplify them. But whether or not this is right, the important point for our purposes is simply that Arius and Athanasius both believe that in human reproduction, the father's 'substance' (whatever it is) is divided up—that is, a part is broken off and given to the offspring—while in divine production, the Father's substance cannot be divided in this way. (We have already seen that Arius believes this, but we will see below that Athanasius believes this too.)

<sup>29</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.26 (NPNF 2, 4: 321): "Plainly, if they [viz., the Arians] inquire of parents concerning their son, let them consider whence is the child which is begotten. For granting the parent had not a son before his begetting, still, after having him, he had him, not as external or as foreign, but as from himself, and proper to his essence and his exact image"; *DS*, 51 (NPNF 2, 4: 477): "it is thereby confessed that what is generated from any thing, is coessential with that which generated it. . . . For should it happen that there were not two brothers, but that only one had come of that essence, he that was generated would not be called alien in essence . . . but though alone, he must be coessential with him that begat him . . . this is a property of children with reference to their parents. And in like manner also, when the fathers said that the Son of God was from His essence, reasonably have they spoken of Him as coessential."



This is not so for creatures and works of art. God created Adam, but he did not give Adam his divine nature. Michaelangelo sculpted the David statue, but he did not give the statue a human nature. Of course, creators and artists can give their image or likeness to a product, but that is not the same thing as giving it their nature.<sup>30</sup>

Athanasius thinks this basic model applies to God too, though he is careful to make an important qualification: human fathers beget sons by giving up a *part* of their substance, but God the Father gives his *whole self* to his Son, not a part. The reason for this is that like Arius, Athanasius believes the Father is utterly simple. There are no ingredients in the Father, so anything in the Father is, strictly speaking, absolutely identical to the Father.<sup>31</sup> (Thus, like Arius, Athanasius agrees that the Godhood is not an ingredient in the Father; rather, it *just is* the Father.)

As we saw before, Arius infers from this that the Father cannot break off a part of himself, and that led him to conclude that the Father must create the Son out of nothing.<sup>32</sup> Athanasius agrees that the Father cannot break off a part of his substance, but Athanasius thinks Arius has not seen all the available options. The Father's utter simplicity entails only this: if the Father is going to give any of his substance to the Son, he has got to give the whole thing, or none at all. It is not a question of a part; it is a question of all or none.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Athanasius, *DD*, 13 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 158): "For what man . . . does not perceive, that what are created and made are external to the maker; but the Son . . . exists not externally, but from the Father who begat Him? for man too both builds a house and begets a son, and no one would reverse things, and say . . . that the house was an image of the maker, but the son unlike him who begat him; but rather he will confess that the son is an image of the father, but the house a work of art"; *ibid.*, 23 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 165–166): "Indeed, if we say that the Word is from the essence of God . . . what does this mean but the truth and eternity of the essence from which He [viz., the Son] is begotten? for it is not different in kind. . . . Nor is He like only outwardly, lest He seem in some respect or wholly to be other in essence, as brass shines like gold and silver like tin. For these are foreign and of other nature, . . . nor is brass proper to gold, nor is the pigeon born from the dove; but though they are considered like, yet they differ in essence"; *DS*, 48 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 475): "For if the Word [viz., the Son] be a work and foreign to the Father's essence, so that He is separated from the Father by the difference of nature, He cannot be one in essence with Him, but rather He is homogeneous by nature with the works. . . . On the other hand, if we confess that He is not a work but the genuine offspring of the Father's essence, it would follow that He is inseparable from the Father, being connatural, because He is begotten from Him."

<sup>31</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.28 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 322): "But with God [viz., the Father] this cannot be; for He is not composed of parts, but being impassible and simple, He is impassibly and indivisibly Father of the Son." And a little later in the same paragraph, when speaking about the Arians, Athanasius says (*NPNF* 2, 4: 323): "why speculate they [viz., the Arians] about passions and parts in the instance of the immaterial and indivisible God[?]"

<sup>32</sup>As Athanasius clearly recognizes. *CA*, 1.15 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 315): "they [viz., the Arians] deny that the Son is the proper offspring of the Father's essence, on the ground that this must imply parts and divisions."

<sup>33</sup>Athanasius, *DD*, 11 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 157): "but God, being without parts, is Father of the Son without partition or passion; for there is neither effluence of the Immaterial, nor influx from without, as among men; and being uncompounded in nature, He is Father of One Only Son"; *ibid.*, 24 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 166): "in like manner when we hear the phrase 'one in essence', let us not fall upon human senses, and imagine partitions and divisions of the Godhead, but . . . let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature"; *CA*, 1.28 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 322): "nor [must] the



Of course, Athanasius denies that the Son is created without any ingredients, so he cannot say that the Father gives none of his substance to the Son. Thus, he goes with the former option: the Father gives the Son his whole self.<sup>34</sup> Like human fathers then, God the Father begets God the Son by giving his substance to the Son. But unlike human fathers, God the Father gives his whole self to the Son, and not just a part of himself. For Athanasius then, *the Father himself* is an ingredient in the Son.<sup>35</sup>

This allows Athanasius to draw some important conclusions. First of all, by saying that the Son is produced from the Father's substance, Athanasius can say that the Son is not created. Like human sons, God's Son is produced with at least one pre-existing ingredient, namely the Father himself, and that is enough to show that the Son is not created from nothing.<sup>36</sup>

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Son [be] considered to be part of God, nor the generation to imply any passion whatever"; *ibid.*, 2.34 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 366): "For if in the case of these originate and irrational things [e.g., the sun] offsprings [e.g., the sun's radiance] are found which are not parts of the essences from which they are, nor subsist with passion, nor impair the essences of their originals [e.g., as the radiance of the sun does not divide the sun's essence but rather contains and expresses all of it], are they [viz., the Arians] not mad again in seeking and conjecturing parts and passions in the instance of the immaterial and true God, and ascribing divisions to Him who is beyond passion and change, thereby to perplex the ears of the simple and to pervert them from the Truth?"

<sup>34</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.16 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 316): "that which is begotten [viz., the Son] is neither affection nor division of that blessed Essence [of the Father]. Hence it is not incredible that God should have a Son, the Offspring of His own essence; nor do we imply affection or division of God's essence, when we speak of 'son' and 'Offspring'; *ibid.*, 2.32–33 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 366): "[The Arians ask:] How can the Son be from eternity? or how can He be from the Father's Essence, yet not a part? since what is said to be of another, is a part of him; and what is divided, is not whole. These are the evil sophistries of the heterodox . . . we see that the radiance from the sun is proper to it, and the sun's essence is not divided or impaired; but its essence is whole and its radiance perfect and whole, without impairing the essence of light, but as a true offspring from it. We understand in like manner that the Son is begotten not from without but from the Father, and . . . the Father remains whole."

<sup>35</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 3.6 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 396): "Nor is this Form of the Godhead [in the Son] partial merely, but the Fulness [*sic*] of the Father's Godhead is the Being of the Son, and the Son is whole God . . . the Godhead and the Form of the Son is none other than the Father's"; *ibid.*, 3.5 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 396): "for the Godhead of the Son is the Father's, and it is in the Son"; *ibid.*, 3.5 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 396): "it must necessarily be understood that the Godhead and propriety of the Father is the Being of the Son"; *ibid.*, 3.6 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 396): "the Father's Form which is in Him [viz., the Son] shews in Him the Father; and thus the Father is in the Son"; *ibid.*, 3.3 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395): "For the Son is in the Father. . . because the whole Being of the Son is proper to the Father's essence, as radiance from light, and stream from fountain. . . For the Father is in the Son, since the Son is what is from the Father and proper to Him, . . . for whoso thus contemplates the Son, contemplates what is proper to the Father's Essence, and knows that the Father is in the Son. For . . . the Form and Godhead of the Father is the Being of the Son."

<sup>36</sup>When the Scriptures speak of the Word coming into being in some way or other, Athanasius consistently argues that this refers to the Word becoming *incarnate*. It does not, says Athanasius, refer to the Son's *Godhood* coming into being. For Athanasius, the Godhood in the Son is not produced, and that fits my definition of a pre-existing ingredient. E.g., *CA*, 1.60 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 341): "let them [viz., the Arians] know that Paul does not signify that His [viz., the Son's] essence has become"; *ibid.*, 1.62 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 342): "who does not see that he [viz., Paul] has not used the word 'become' of the essence of the Word. . . Let them [viz., the Arians] cease therefore to take the word 'become' of the substance of the Son"; *ibid.*, 1.64 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 343): "And the words 'Become my strong rock' do not denote that the essence of God Himself became, but His loving kindness, as has been said, so also here [these words] do not signify that the essence of the Word is originate (perish the thought!)" *ibid.*, 2.67 (*NPNF* 2,

Second, Athanasius can say that God's Son is divine just like his Father. God's Son inherits his divine properties from the substance he gets from his Father, just as human sons inherit their human properties from the substance they get from their fathers.<sup>37</sup> But since the Father's substance is not divided up, the Son is *homoousios* (same in substance) with his Father in a quite literal sense. God's Son does not just have the same kind of substance as his Father; he has numerically the same substance.<sup>38</sup>

There is one more important point to notice here. Even though the whole Father is an ingredient in the Son, Athanasius thinks the Father is not *identical* to the Son. As I explained above, an ingredient cannot be identical to the product in question, and that applies in the Son's case too. Besides, if the Father were identical to the Son, that would amount to modalism, and Athanasius explicitly rejects that (as does Arius).<sup>39</sup> So even

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4: 385): "Not of His [viz., the Son's] essence then is 'He created' [in Pr. 8:22] indicative, as has many times been said, but of His bodily generation."

<sup>37</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 2.22 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 360): "the Son's Essence is proper to the Father, and He in all points like Him"; *ibid.*, 3.16 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 403): "for the Word is God, and He alone has the Form of the Father"; *ibid.*, 3.36 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 414): "For the Father, having given all things to the Son, in the Son still hath all things; and the Son having, still the Father hath them; for the Son's Godhead is the Father's Godhead"; *ibid.*, 2.24 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 361): "it is proper to the Son, to have the things of the Father, and to be such that the Father is seen in Him"; *ibid.*, 3.4 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395): "since they [viz., the Father and the Son] are one, and the Godhead itself one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father . . . for instance, that He [viz., the Son] is God, . . . Almighty, . . . and so on with other attributes"; *ibid.*, 3.5 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395–396): "And why are the attributes of the Father ascribed to the Son, except that the Son is an Offspring from Him? . . . And the Son, being the proper Offspring of the Father's Essence, reasonably says that the Father's attributes are His own also"; *ibid.*, 3.6 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 396): "what is said of the Father is also said of the Son, not as accruing to His Essence by grace or participation, but because the very Being of the Son is the proper Offspring of the Father's Essence. . . . For the Son is such as the Father is, because He has all that is the Father's."

<sup>38</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.61 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 341): "And what does this denote but the Son's genuineness, and that the Godhead of the Father is the same as the Son's?"; *ibid.*, 2.41 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 370): "the Word of God is One, being the only Son proper and genuine from His Essence, and having with His Father the oneness of Godhead indivisible"; *ibid.*, 3.4 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395): "by way of shewing the identity of Godhead and the unity of Essence. For they [viz., the Father and the Son] are one, not as one thing divided into two parts, . . . but the nature is one; . . . and all that is the Father's, is the Son's"; *ibid.*, 3.4 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395): "for if the Son be other, as an Offspring, still He is the Same as God; and He and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature, and in the identity of the one Godhead, as has been said. . . . So also the Godhead of the Son is the Father's; whence also it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none other but He"; *ibid.*, 3.22 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 405): "The Word then has the real and true identity of nature with the Father"; *DS*, 50 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 477): "plainly the Son is not unlike in essence, but coessential with the Father; for if what the Father has is by nature the Son's, and the Son Himself is from the Father, and because of this oneness of godhead and of nature He and the Father are one, . . . reasonably is He [viz., the Son] called by the fathers 'Coessential.'" Note, though, that for Athanasius, *homoousios* only goes one way: the Son has the Father's substance, but the Father does not have the Son's substance. In other words, as Stead has noted, *homoousios* is for Athanasius an asymmetrical relation (*Divine Substance*, pp. 260–261).

<sup>39</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 3.4 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395): "nor [are the Father and Son one] as one thing twice named, . . . for this Sabellius holding was judged an heretic. But They are two, because the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father"; *ibid.*, 3.36 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 413): "For let a man, perceiving that the Son has all that the Father hath, from the exact likeness and identity of that He hath, should wander into the irreligion of Sabellius, considering Him [viz., the Son] to be the Father, . . . He is not the Father, but the Father's

though the Father becomes an ingredient in the Son, the Father is still not identical to the Son.

Consequently, it seems to me that Athanasius would have to admit that the Son is not utterly simple in the way the Father is. For on Athanasius's view, the Son includes a pre-existing ingredient, namely the Father, and that ingredient is not identical to the Son. Thus, the Son includes an ingredient that is distinct from himself in some way, while the Father includes no ingredients whatsoever. For Athanasius then, it looks as if the Son must be more complex, at least in *some* sense, than the Father.

### Problems

Athanasius's view raises some interesting questions. One of the things Athanasius likes about natural procreation is that sons get their natures from one of their ingredients, namely the substance they get from their fathers. For example, in God's case, the Father is an ingredient in the Son, and the Son inherits his divine properties from that ingredient. However, the Son is not identical to the Father, and it is not clear to me how the Son is supposed to inherit properties from something he is not identical to.

Consider an analogous case: a statue and the bronze it is made from.<sup>40</sup> Bronze statues, after all, inherit certain properties from their bronze. For instance, a statue has a certain size, shape, and mass because it is made from a lump of bronze that has that size, shape, and mass. If we can explain how statues inherit properties from their bronze, then maybe we can explain how the Son inherits properties from the Father.

For convenience, let me call the statue 'Athena,' and let me call the bronze 'Lumpel.' According to what many analytic philosophers call the 'standard view' of material constitution, Lumpel and Athena are two numerically distinct, non-identical objects that share the same material parts (at some level of decomposition), and that coincide in the same region of space.<sup>41</sup>

Now, there are certain properties that Lumpel and Athena do not share. For instance, they do not share their kind-properties. Lumps of bronze are not the same kinds of things as statues. Nor do Lumpel and Athena share their modal properties. For example, lumps of bronze can survive being melted down and recast, whereas statues cannot.

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Word. . . . For if all things [from the Father] are delivered unto Him [viz., the Son], . . . He is other than that all which He has received." For Arius, see his *LA* (NPNF 2, 4: 458): "He [viz., the Father] made Him [viz., the Son], . . . [but not] as Sabellius, dividing the Monad, speaks of a Son-and-Father."

<sup>40</sup>Richard Cross proposes this helpful analogy in "On Generic and Derivation Views of God's Trinitarian Substance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), pp. 464–480.

<sup>41</sup>There are other views of material constitution. For example, as I explained earlier, some believe that Lumpel and Athena are identical in some way (e.g., 'contingently' or 'occasionally'). These sorts of views are not relevant here, however, because Athanasius and Arius both maintain that the Father and Son are not identical, so if material constitution is going to provide a helpful analogy for their views of the Trinity, we will have to stick to theories where Lumpel and Athena are not identical.

But there are other properties that Lumpel and Athena do share. (And here I am not talking about the countless properties that Lumpel and Athena share with *everything*. I am only talking about properties that they share in virtue of the fact that they coincide.) For example, Lumpel and Athena share material properties like size, shape, and mass. Similarly, Lumpel and Athena exist together for a period of time, so they share certain temporal properties too. Accordingly, when we say  $x$  inherits a property from  $y$ , what we mean is that  $x$  and  $y$  share a property in virtue of the fact that they coincide.

Still, what explains why coinciding objects share certain properties but not others? I think most would say that coinciding material objects share certain kinds of properties because they share certain kinds of parts. For example, Lumpel and Athena share *material* properties because they share *material* parts. But we could also say the same thing about temporal parts. The first quarter and the first half of a Notre Dame football game share certain *temporal* parts (e.g., all the seconds of the game's first quarter), and that is why they share certain *temporal* properties.<sup>42</sup>

It might be tempting to put this to work in the divine case. For if we say that the Godhood is like a divine 'part,' then maybe we could say that coinciding persons who share that divine 'part' would also share divine properties. Of course, the Father and the Son share the Godhood (for the Father just is the Godhood, and the Son has it as one of his ingredients), so *ex hypothesi*, they would share divine properties too.

But before this strategy could be successful, we would still have to answer more questions. For one thing, this strategy construes the Godhood as a 'part' rather than a constituent, and it is not obvious that parts are related to their wholes in the way that constituents are related to what they constitute.

Consider Lumpel and Athena again. Now, it is not exactly clear what Athena's parts are (perhaps they are her particles, perhaps they are her arms, legs, and the like), but whatever they are, is Athena related to them in the same way that she is related to Lumpel? And in the divine case, is the Godhood more like the particles (or arms, legs, etc.) that Athena is composed of, or is the Godhood more like Lumpel?

Besides, should we even be thinking about 'parts' in God in the first place? Many classical authors would say no. Thus, if we want to say that coincident objects share certain properties because they share certain kinds of parts, we would have a hard time applying that to the Trinity in a way that remains faithful to the classical tradition.

But whatever we might want to say about these questions, if we claim that coincident objects (or persons) share certain kinds of properties because they share certain kinds of parts, then we have only identified the *conditions* for shared properties. We have not really explained *how* those properties are shared, and that, it seems to me, is precisely what calls out most for explanation here.

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<sup>42</sup>I owe this example to a conversation with Joseph Jedwab.

Indeed, when we say that Athena and Lumpel share certain properties, what exactly do we mean? Do we mean that those properties are instantiated twice—once in Lumpel, and once in Athena? If so, then suppose that Lumpel and Athena share the same weight: e.g., 10kg. If this were instantiated twice, then Lumpel would be 10kg, and Athena would be 10kg too. But then the total weight should add up to 20kg, which of course seems odd, because our scales only show a total weight of 10kg.

On the other hand, if Lumpel's and Athena's shared properties are not instantiated twice, then presumably they must be instantiated once. So who or what would they be instantiated *in*? In Lumpel, or in Athena? Either way, one of the two would not have a weight, and that seems odd too.

Perhaps one might say that, strictly speaking, shared properties are instantiated in *neither* Lumpel nor Athena, for properties do not 'inhere' in subjects at all. Rather, what it means for a property to be instantiated by something is just for that property to 'occur' in that particular region of space.

But Lumpel and Athena both occur in the same region of space, and so all their properties occur in that same region of space too. Wouldn't *all* their properties then be shared? That would lead to contradictions. For instance, Lumpel can, but Athena cannot, survive being melted down, so Athena and Lumpel cannot share such features without contradiction.

Now transfer all of this over to the Trinity. When we say that the Father and Son share divine properties, are we saying that those properties are instantiated twice—once in the Father, and once in the Son? Surely that would entail that there are *two* (coincident) Gods, and I just cannot see Athanasius agreeing to that. On the other hand, if we think that shared properties are only instantiated once, then who would those properties belong to? The Father, or the Son? Either way, one of them would not be divine in the proper sense, and I do not think Athanasius would agree to that either.

Alternatively, if we think that properties do not 'inhere' in subjects but rather simply occur in a particular region of space, and assuming that it even makes sense to talk about God filling a 'region of space,' then wouldn't the Father and Son share *all* their properties? After all, they both occur in the same 'region of space,' as it were. If so, that would lead to contradictions. For example, the Son is begotten but the Father is not, so the Son cannot share the Father's unbegottenness (I will return to this point in a moment).

Perhaps we could offer Athanasius some help by suggesting that he takes a view where, say, Lumpel and Athena are numerically the same, but not identical. On this view, the Father and the Son would be numerically the same, but not identical, and so there would be one God there, not two, without the Father and Son being identical. Surely that is just the sort of thing Athanasius is after.

Whatever the merits of this strategy, I still have similar questions. In what sense are divine properties *shared*? Would it make any sense to say that they are instantiated twice? I wouldn't think so, for the Father and Son are one, and presumably their shared properties are instantiated only

'once' in some sense too. But if these shared properties are only instantiated once, then again: who or what do they belong to? The Father? The Son? Neither? And when we say something like "the Son is omnipotent," do we just mean that "the Son is numerically the same as, but not identical to, something that *is* omnipotent (viz., the Father)"?

I am not suggesting that these questions cannot or have not been answered. Nor am I trying to raise objections to the general coherence of any of these views of material constitution. In fact, I think comparing the problem of material constitution to the problem of the Trinity is very helpful. Rather, I am querying for a more detailed account of how, precisely, these properties are shared, and asking these sorts of questions is one way to start thinking about that. For the time being, however, it is not clear exactly how or in what sense Athanasius thinks the Father and Son are supposed to share divine properties, but that, as I said above, is precisely what calls out most for explanation here.

Still, even if Athanasius could explain how the Son inherits properties from the Father, there is another problem. Like Arius, Athanasius believes that the Father is simple, and so anything 'in' the Father is, strictly speaking, identical to the Father. Consequently, if the Son is going to inherit any properties from the Father, then surely he would have to inherit them all. As Athanasius himself realizes, it is not a question of the Son inheriting part of the Father. It is a question of all or none.

However, there are certain properties the Son cannot inherit from the Father, on pain of contradiction.<sup>43</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the Son cannot inherit the Father's unbegottenness without contradiction, for the Son is begotten, but the Father is not. Similarly, the Son cannot inherit the Father's fatherhood without contradiction either, for that would make the Son the Father of himself, even though he is not the Father of himself.<sup>44</sup>

One might interject that the Son inherits only the Father's divine properties and not his personal properties like fatherhood. Unfortunately, Athanasius frequently says that the Father (who, recall, is God) is essentially a Father.<sup>45</sup> When he says this, he is reacting to Arius. As Athanasius sees it,

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<sup>43</sup>Richard Cross points this problem out in "Generic and Derivation Views," p. 469.

<sup>44</sup>To his credit, Athanasius does claim that the Son inherits all of the Father's properties *except* the Father's fatherhood. *CA*, 3.4 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 395): "And so, . . . the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except His being said to be Father"; *DS*, 49 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 476): "what is said of the Father, is said in Scripture of the Son also, all but His being called Father . . . as for instance, the name God, . . . Almighty, [etc.] . . . And in a word, all that you find said of the Father, so much will you find said of the Son, all but His being Father." The problem is, however, that Athanasius does not explain how this is possible. Unless Athanasius can provide a principled way to show why the Son only inherits *some* but not *all* of the Father's properties, then saying that the Son inherits everything from the Father except his fatherhood seems rather *ad hoc*.

<sup>45</sup>For example, *CA*, 1.28 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 323): "Wherefore He is ever Father, nor is the character of Father adventitious to God, lest He seem alterable"; *ibid.*, 1.29 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 323): "And a man may be and may be called Maker, though the works are not yet; but father he cannot be called, nor can he be, unless a son exist"; *ibid.*, 3.66 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 430): "But to say of the Son, 'He might not have been', is an irreligious presumption reaching even to the Essence of the Father, as if what is His own might not have been. For it is the same as saying, 'The Father



Arius seems to think that God *became* a Father when he begat the Son, and that implies that God can change (e.g., from not being a Father to being a Father).<sup>46</sup> But since God cannot change, Athanasius insists that the Father is *essentially* a Father.<sup>47</sup>

I take it, then, that Athanasius thinks the Father's essential properties include his fatherhood in addition to divine properties like omnipotence, goodness, and so forth.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, since the Father is utterly simple, if the Son inherits the Father's nature, then surely the Son would inherit *all* (not just some) of the Father's essential properties, and that would include his fatherhood.

Thus, it looks as if the Father's utter simplicity means that the Son must inherit all or none of the Father's properties. But since there are at least one or two properties that the Son cannot inherit, it would seem to follow that the Son cannot inherit any of the Father's properties. Unless Athanasius can offer a principled way to explain why the Son inherits only some of the Father's properties but not others, then his theory will collapse into contradictions and impossibility.

(I have focused my attention here on divine properties like omnipotence and goodness, but those are not the only features I wonder about. What about God's intellect and will? Does Athanasius think the Son inherits the Father's intellect and will too?<sup>49</sup> If Athanasius cannot explain how

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might not have been good'. And as the Father is always good by nature, so He is always generative by nature."

<sup>46</sup>Athanasius spends a good deal of time in Book 1 of the *CA* trying to show that Arius's view implies that the Father was not always a Father. For example, 1.11 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 312): "In this difficulty, you [viz., Arius] can but answer, that there was a time when the Word was not; for your very adverb 'once' naturally signifies this." In response, Athanasius insists that the Father is essentially a Father, and so he was always a Father, e.g., *ibid.*, 1.25 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 321): "Whereas God is, He was eternally; since then the Father is ever, His Radiance ever is, which is His Word. And again, God who is, hath from Himself His word who also is; and neither hath the Word been added, whereas he was not before"; *ibid.*, 1.29 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 323): "But the Son, not being a work, but proper to the Father's offspring, always is; for, whereas the Father always is, so what is proper to His essence must always be; and this is His Word and his Wisdom."

<sup>47</sup>Athanasius, *CA*, 1.35 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 327): "For the Father is unalterable and unchangeable, and is always in the same state and the same"; *ibid.*, 1.14 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 314): "For never was the essence of the Father imperfect, that what is proper to it should be added afterwards; nor, as man from man, has the Son been begotten, so as to be later than His Father's existence, but He is God's offspring, and as being proper Son of God [viz., the Father], who is ever, He [viz., the Son] exists eternally"; *ibid.*, 1.19 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 317): "but as to the Son, He is such as the Father is, of whose essence He is proper Offspring, Word, and Wisdom. For this is proper to the Son, as regards the Father, and this shews that the Father is proper to the Son; that we may neither say that God was ever without Word, nor that the Son was non-existent."

<sup>48</sup>Athanasius, *DS*, 34 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 469): "If when you name the Father, or use the word 'God', you do not signify essence, or understand Him according to essence, . . . and so, shrinking from saying that God is truly Father, and making Him compound who is simple, in a material way, you will be authors of a newer blasphemy"; *ibid.*, 35 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 469): "But if, when we hear it said, 'I am that I am' [Ex. 3:14], . . . we understand nothing else than the very simple, and blessed, and incomprehensible essence itself of Him that is, (for though we be unable to master what He is, yet hearing 'Father', and 'God', and 'Almighty', we understand nothing else to be meant than very essence of Him that is)."

<sup>49</sup>It seems to me that Athanasius thinks the Son does inherit (at least some of) his knowledge from the Father. See, for instance, *CA*, 3.44 (*NPNF* 2, 4: 418): "And again, if all that is the



the Son gets his intellect and will, then how could the Son be a *person*? Surely a person has to have an intellect and will.)

### Conclusion

All of this illustrates two basic issues that any account of the Trinity might face when it tries to explain how one divine person produces another. First, we need to think carefully before we identify the Godhood with any one divine person. As the old saying goes, that would "confound the essence with the persons." If we do identify the Godhood with any one divine person, then we still need to explain how the other persons inherit divine properties, and as I hope is evident by now, that is no easy task.<sup>50</sup>

One way to avoid this whole problem is just to say that the Godhood is an ingredient that all three persons share, but which is not absolutely identical to any of them (or at least is not identified with one more than the others). Of course, this entails saying that the Father is not utterly simple, for he will have a distinct ingredient within himself, namely the Godhood. But I see no problem with this. If it is okay to say that the Godhood is an ingredient in the Son (as Athanasius claims), then surely it is okay to say that the Godhood is an ingredient in the Father too.

However, some theologians find this idea worrisome. As they see it, if we say that the Godhood is some kind of distinct ingredient that is not identified with at least one of the persons, then it looks as if there are four things there, namely the Father, Son, and Spirit, plus the Godhood itself. And that, in turn, makes the persons look irrelevant. After all, all the really good stuff (like omnipotence and omniscience) belongs to the Godhood, so what need is there for the persons?<sup>51</sup>

I think this is a very important worry, but I am not sure it provides enough reason to identify the Godhood with one person more than the others. For we would still be left with two persons who 'inherit' the Godhood, and we would need to explain why those two persons would not

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Father's, is the Son's (and this He Himself has said), and it is the Father's attribute to know the day [when creation ends], it is plain that the Son too knows it, having this proper to Him from the Father."

<sup>50</sup>Éphrem Boularand puts it well (*L'Hérésie d'Arius et la «Foi» de Nicée*, 2 volumes [Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1972–1973], 1: 68): "this confounds the essence and the person, for it makes the personal properties of the Father into the perfections of the divine substance. For one cannot say that God is 'ingenerate' and 'without a source' without denying the divinity of the Son, for he is 'generate' and comes from a 'source'" (my translation). At this point in his narrative, Boularand is talking about Arius, but the comment applies just as much to Athanasius.

<sup>51</sup>Karl Rahner, Colin Gunton, and John Zizioulas are just three examples of modern theologians who have this worry. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1999), p. 17; Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), p. 54; and John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p. 17. Of course, this is not a modern worry. In the twelfth century, for instance, there was a dispute between Joachim of Fiore and Peter Lombard on this very issue. See Fiona Robb, "Intellectual Tradition and Misunderstanding: The Development of Academic Theology on the Trinity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University College, London, 1993.

be subordinate to the other one. Besides, to say that the Godhood should not be identified with one person more than the others does not necessarily mean that the Godhood will somehow then be superior to the persons. My free will is not the same as my person, but that does not make it more superior and me irrelevant.

In any case, the worry is there. Whatever the Godhood is, it is a pretty awesome entity, so we should be careful not to ascribe it too much independence at the expense of the persons. The point I want to make here is simply that identifying the Godhood with one person over the others is not the way I would avoid this worry.

The second issue is this: how do we distinguish between *producing* a divine person and *creating* something out of nothing? The Creeds are emphatically clear that the Son is not created out of nothing, so any account of the Son's production that aims to be faithful to the Creeds would, I think, want to show how the Son is not created.<sup>52</sup>

It seems to me that this is an important question for so-called 'social views' of the Trinity, where the divine persons are distinct individuals that form a social collective. On such views, it looks as if the persons are *entirely* distinct individuals in the sense that they do not share any ingredients (in my sense of the word).<sup>53</sup> But if that is right, then the Father would have to produce the Son without any pre-existing ingredients, and by my definition of creation, that would mean that the Son is created from nothing.

One might object that an advocate of the social view could argue that the Son is necessarily produced eternally, and since the Son is necessary and does not *begin* to exist at some point in time, he is not created. However, as I said earlier, many philosophers throughout history have believed that creation is, in fact, necessary and eternal. So why isn't the social account of the Son's production a similar case?

In closing, let me just say that although I have only discussed what Arius and Athanasius have to say about how the Son is produced, they are not the only theologians with interesting theories about this. The history of the doctrine of the Trinity is filled with intense debate about the Son's generation, and much of that discussion remains untapped.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>The Nicene Creed says this: "We believe in . . . the Son of God, . . . And those who say . . . that he came from things that were not [in existence] . . . these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes" (*The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 volumes, ed. Norman Tanner [London: Sheed and Ward, and Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1: 5/\*5).

<sup>53</sup>For instance, Richard Swinburne holds this view, as far as I can tell. See *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 170–191.

<sup>54</sup>I want to thank Greg Spendlove, Mark Henninger, Dale Tuggy, Joseph Jedwab, Michael Rea, Richard Cross, Thomas Flint, and two anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts (in whole or part) of this paper. It is much improved as a consequence. All errors are mine.