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William Hasker, METAPHYSICS AND THE TRI-PERSONAL GOD

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Peter van Inwagen's essay, "Causation and the Mental," offers a striking solution to Jaegwon Kim's puzzle for non-reductive materialists about mental events/states and mental causation: the solution, reminiscent of van Inwagen's solution in *Material Beings* to certain puzzles surrounding constitution/composition, is that there are no such things as events or causation, and a fortiori no such things as mental events or mental causation, and hence nothing that can raise any puzzle. (More precisely, the claim is that causation, and a fortiori, mental causation, is never *instantiated*.) This is no ad hoc reply, but rather a consequence of van Inwagen's very general ontological claim that everything is either a substance or a relation; thus, there are no events and no causation, since the latter is a relation that holds between events if it holds at all. (Van Inwagen does not deny that there are true causal *explanations*, but the truth of these, he argues, does not require that there are any events.) Van Inwagen has demonstrated one advantage of denying the existence of events, namely that doing so allows one to avoid a certain puzzle one might otherwise have to confront. I suppose that could be taken as a reason to deny the existence of events. Even if it is such a reason, it has to be weighed against all the difficulties involved in such a denial. In any case, van Inwagen's ambitions are more modest: he is merely noting that Kim's puzzle presupposes an ontology that one need not endorse, and that van Inwagen rejects on independent grounds.

The volume is rounded out by two other pieces: an excellent editorial introduction and a moving and informative appreciation of Plantinga's philosophical contributions, delivered by his long-time friend and colleague, Nicholas Wolterstorff. The former provides an overarching framework for the volume, and the latter drives home the significance of Plantinga's achievements, especially for those of us who weren't around in the "balmy days of positivism." All in all, this high-caliber volume is a fitting tribute to one of our greatest philosophers.

Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God, by William Hasker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 269 pages. \$99.00 (cloth)

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William Hasker writes: "The 'three-in-oneness' problem of the Trinity is *really hard*" (162). I couldn't agree more. Appropriately for a treatise on that problem, Hasker divides his attempt at a solution into three parts: Trinitarian Foundations, Trinitarian Options, and Trinitarian Construction. Throughout, Hasker pushes something he calls "Social Trinitarianism."

Part I selectively skims the Fathers on the Trinity, focusing on Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and a couple of other “pro-Nicenes.” Part II critiques Barth, Rahner, Moltmann, Zizioulas, Leftow, van Inwagen, Brower and Rea, Craig, Swinburne, and Yandell. Notably, in Chapters 15 and 16, Hasker affirms absolute identity as the only relation whereby anyone can count anything.

I expect that most readers of this journal will be most interested in Part III, where Hasker develops his own syncretistic metaphysics of the Trinity, drawing mainly on Leftow and Craig. Chapter 21, on methodology, tells us that he aims to theorize about “the divine three-in-oneness” so that he can “bring us a step closer to comprehending that mysterious reality” (167). Such theorizing requires some constraints, however, chiefly “accepting the language of trinitarian belief *with its limitations*,” “in particular its analogical character” (170). This implies, he says, that we should “exercise restraint in our attempts to formalize this language” and in our use of it “in the construction of systematic deductive arguments” (170).

Hasker is right. It is wise to treat analogical trinitarian discourse as analogical, and so it is wise to exercise restraint with respect to it in these ways. However, we must not forget a corollary to this sage piece of advice: it is foolish to treat non-analogical trinitarian discourse as analogical, including the statements of a metaphysical theory aimed at solving the three-in-one-ness problem. Imagine meeting a metaphysician who insists that we count only by absolute identity and who gives a metaphysical theory aimed at solving the three-in-one-ness problem. Suppose we find among its statements these three: there is exactly one divine being, there are exactly three divine persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and there is exactly one way to be divine. I would think that, no matter what other learned erudition and metaphysical bells and whistles attends the theory, we should construct a systematic deductive argument to show that these statements entail a contradiction. If the author complains that we’re taking them strictly and literally when she intended them analogically, we should counsel her to find another job, one more suitable to her aspirations, e.g., trinitarian narrative, poetry, or liturgy, all worthy tasks. Metaphysicians have a different task to perform and a different standard to live up to in its performance: to state the cold, sober truth, and to do so strictly and literally, in a rigorous, scrupulously well-defined fashion.

Chapter 22, ostensibly about monotheism, summarizes some of Larry Hurtado’s views regarding the early church’s “binitarian practice.” Chapter 23 insists that each Person is God, where “is God” is used as an adjective to predicate divinity or deity, not identity. Chapter 24 says that each Person is a person, where by “x is a person” Hasker means “x is a center or subject of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action” (193, 196–198; see also 22n15, 256, and Chapter 3 *passim*). Chapter 25 describes the communion of the Persons while Chapter 26 defends the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit. Hasker recognizes that communion, generation, and procession cannot suffice for the needed

“oneness” in an adequate solution to the three-in-oneness problem. For that, we discover in Chapter 27, we need Hasker’s core view, which we might naturally call

Core. “the three Persons share a single concrete nature, a single trope of deity” (227).

Since, according to Hasker, it is “highly plausible” to “equate” the divine nature/trope with the “divine mind/soul” (236, 243), and since on page 257 he adds “a single mental substance” to the equation as well, he “models” (257) his core view in these words, although the label is mine:

Support. The divine nature/trope or divine mind/soul or single mental substance “*support[s]* simultaneously three distinct lives, the lives belonging to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit” (236, my emphasis).

He defends Support’s “conceptual coherence” with split-brain and multiple personality data (231–236).

As Chapter 28 begins, Hasker expresses satisfaction with his “strong case” for the coherence of his first model, but he shouldn’t. That’s because, among other things, few of his peers, if any, will understand what he means by “support.” At some level, he is aware of the problem since he seeks “a more precise account of the relationship between the persons and the divine nature than is provided by the loosely defined ‘support’ relation” (237). However, the problem is more acute than Hasker acknowledges since nowhere does he define it. He says only that “the term is used in the ordinary sense in which we can say that the human body/mind/soul . . . ‘supports’ the continuing conscious life of a human being” (228). This is no definition, not even a “loose” one; nor is there any such thing as “the ordinary sense” of the term “supports” that is used to say that “the human body/mind/soul supports the continuing conscious life of a human being.” Thus, the primary explanatory relation posited by the first model is an explanatory surd.

Fortunately, he ditches “the support relation,” replacing it with the transitive, asymmetrical, irreflexive constitution relation (245), which he initially defines in such a way that *x* constitutes *y* only if *x* is spatially coincident with *y* and it is possible for *x* to exist without *y*, two implications he wants to avoid for theological reasons, along with another. The final definition, which the reader must piece together for herself (241–243), is this:

x constitutes *y* at time *t* if and only if

- (i) *x* is absolutely distinct from *y*;
- (ii) *x* and *y* have all their parts in common at *t*;
- (iii) *x* is in *G*-favorable circumstances at *t*;
- (iv) necessarily, for any *x*, if *x* is of primary kind *F* at *t* and *x* is in *G*-favorable circumstances at *t*, then there is a *y* such that *y* is of primary kind *G* at *t* and *y* has all of its parts in common with *x* at *t*;

- (v) it is (conceptually, but not necessarily metaphysically) possible for x to exist at t but for there to be no y at t that has all of its parts in common with x .

Hasker tells us that (ii) “should suffice to secure the needed ‘closeness’ between x and y ” that had been secured by spatial coincidence in the initial definition, and that “if, as is commonly thought, souls are metaphysically simple, then neither x nor y will have ‘proper parts’; what they share, then, will be only their single ‘improper part,’ which is the soul in its entirety” (243).

Hasker clarifies two concepts in his definition: primary kind and G -favorable circumstances. The *primary kind* of a thing, he says, supplies the answer to the question, “What most fundamentally is it”? Hasker has no theory of primary kinds but, quoting Lynne Rudder Baker, on whom he relies heavily, he says that “If x constitutes y , then y has whole classes of causal properties that x would not have had if x had not constituted anything” (240). For example, “a cat has innumerable causal properties that would not be possessed by a heap of cat tissue, were that heap not to constitute a cat” (240). The *G-favorable circumstances* are “precisely the circumstances in which an object [x] of primary kind F must find itself at a given time in order to constitute an object of kind G at that time,” where the circumstances may include features either intrinsic or extrinsic to x (241). For example, if x is of the primary kind *mass of cat tissue* and y is of the primary kind *felis catus* and x constitutes y , then x “does so in virtue of certain circumstances in which x finds itself; lacking those circumstances, x might [conceptually “might”] exist without constituting anything” (241).

Hasker then applies his definition to the subject matter of the book. For F in the schema, he tells us to substitute *divine mind/soul* or *concrete divine nature/trope* or *single mental substance*; for G , substitute *divine trinitarian person*; and for *G-favorable circumstances*, substitute “when [the divine mind/soul or concrete divine nature/trope or single mental substance] *sustains simultaneously three divine life-streams*, each life-stream including cognitive, affective, and volitional states” (243, his emphasis). He continues: “Since in fact [the divine mind/soul or concrete divine nature/trope or single mental substance] does *sustain* three life-streams simultaneously, there are exactly three divine persons” (243, my emphasis). Thus we have Hasker’s second model, which we might label

Sustain. The divine mind/soul or concrete divine nature/trope or single mental substance constitutes each of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit when it “*sustains simultaneously three divine life-streams*, each life-stream including cognitive, affective, and volitional states.”

Hasker beams: “all is as it should be” (243). But clearly: *not* all is as it should be. Among other things, “sustains” is at least as undefined as “supports,” and so the critical G -favorable circumstances under which the divine mind/soul, etc. is supposed to constitute each of the Persons are simply unintelligible.

We might well wonder where God is in all this. Chapter 29 answers with a “grammar of the Trinity” that specifies “three different and distinctive uses of this word [“God”] in the vicinity of trinitarian doctrine” (246): (i) to refer to “Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, who was known to Jesus as Father” (246–247), (ii) to predicate divinity or deity of each of the Persons (247–249), and (iii) to refer to “the Trinity as a whole” (249–250), which, according to Hasker, is absolutely identical with either a composite object distinct from the Persons who are its proper parts (144, 198, 243), or a maximally tight-knit “community of persons” (196, 249, 258). Chapter 30 summarizes the book in three pages.

Aside from my concerns about the intelligibility of “supports” and “sustains,” I have several other concerns. For example, what is it, exactly, that does the constituting? The options on offer—(i) divine mind/soul, (ii) concrete divine nature or trope, and (iii) single mental substance—do not fall into the same category, despite Hasker’s “equation,” and the models may well have different implications, some welcome, some not, depending on which we opt for. Another example: for each option, when it satisfies Hasker’s conditions for constituting something else, how is it, exactly, that the result is a person, as opposed to, say, a personality? A third: even if the result is a person, what is it about the constituter in virtue of which a constituted Person is divine? For, on the one hand, if the constituter is itself omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, uncreated, etc., and if it is distinct from each of the constituted Persons, each of whom is distinct from the other and also omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, uncreated, etc., don’t we have four divine beings on our inventory? On the other hand, if the constituter is itself neither omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, nor uncreated, etc., then, even if it does “support” or “sustain” a stream of “cognitive, affective, and volitional states,” thereby resulting in a constituted Person, in virtue of what, exactly, is that Person omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, uncreated, etc.? A fourth concern: if one constituted divine Person is absolutely distinct from a second constituted divine Person, then there are at least two divine Persons. But if there are at least two divine Persons, why aren’t there at least two divine beings? So what if there’s just one trope of divinity. On Hasker’s view, we don’t count divine beings by tropes; we count them by absolute identity. Thus, wouldn’t a count of two divine persons also be a count of two divine beings? A fifth concern: why aren’t there three numerically distinct Persons that are qualitatively indistinguishable? What is it about (a) the constituting mind/soul/nature/trope/substance, or (b) the three distinct life-streams of “cognitive, affective, and volitional states,” or (c) the former’s supporting or sustaining the latter, in virtue of which each constituted Person is qualitatively different from each other constituted Person? Presumably, the answer lies in some qualitative difference in the distinct life-streams of mental states, which pushes the question back a step: why aren’t there three numerically distinct life-streams of qualitatively indistinguishable mental states? What is it about (a), (b), and (c) in virtue

of which each life-stream is qualitatively distinguished from each other life-stream?

Unfortunately, space does not permit me to pursue these concerns. Rather, let me draw the reader's attention to another concern, one that begins with a simple question: what is monotheism? Whatever else we might say in answer to this question, surely we can agree on this much:

1. Monotheism implies that there is only one God.

There are not two Gods, three Gods, or four Gods. There is just one God, exactly one. In this connection, note that "God" is used as a count noun by monotheists, a use screechingly absent from Hasker's list of three permitted uses (246–250), a use only grudgingly acknowledged in a footnote as "consistent" with his three (251n6). Christians should be clear with Hasker: *There are not three Gods. There is only one God.* Two statements more integral to the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be found and both use "God" as a count noun.

We might pause to inquire into the nature of this being exactly one of which exists, according to monotheism. The monotheist will answer that a God—with an honorific capital "G" befitting its referent—is the kind of thing that instantiates the divine nature. As is well known, monotheists disagree about what properties that nature involves, but let's suppose Hasker is right: it involves omnipotence or almightiness, omniscience, moral perfection, uncreatedness, etc. (247, 256). Thus, given our supposition, a God is omnipotent or almighty, omniscient, morally perfect, uncreated, etc.

Back to the main thread, a little logic tells us two things:

2. Necessarily, if there is only one God, then there is at least one God.
3. Necessarily, if there is at least one God, then there is a God.

It follows that

4. Monotheism implies that there is a God (from 1–3).

Some Christians hesitate when they see or hear "a God" in discussions such as ours. That's unfortunate. For, like it or not, monotheists—and Christians too, for every Christian is a monotheist—have *a God* on their hands, and a magnificent God at that, a God worthy of our total devotion. So much for monotheism; now let's turn to Hasker.

According to Hasker, "it is entirely unacceptable to describe each—or indeed any—of the trinitarian Persons as 'a God'" (190). That's because—given his philosophical commitments, which are optional for trinitarians—if he deemed it acceptable, then *he* would have to say: "If each Person is 'a God,' and each is distinct from each other Person, then we have at least three Gods" (190). So, to avoid three Gods, Hasker insists that

5. The Father is not a God, the Son is not a God, and the Holy Spirit is not a God.

But, according to Hasker,

6. God is not a person,

since God—whether a composite or community of the Persons—is not a subject of consciousness, knowledge, will, love, and action, and so fails to satisfy Hasker’s definition of “*x* is a person.” Furthermore, since nothing can instantiate the divine nature, and thereby know, will, love, act, and exhibit consciousness unless it is a person, it follows that

7. Necessarily, for any *x*, if *x* is a God, then *x* is a person.

Therefore, on Hasker’s view,

8. God is not a God (from 6 and 7),

and thus

9. Neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit, nor God is a God (from 5 and 8).

But we Christians affirm that

10. Necessarily, if there is a God, then the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or God is a God.

That’s because, by our lights, no one else could possibly fit the bill; not Beelzebub, not Balaam, not Beelzebul, not Barabbas, not anyone. It follows that, on Hasker’s view,

11. It is false that there is a God (from 9 and 10).

Thus, we arrive at the denial of monotheism (from 4 and 11).

How will Hasker respond to this argument?

Well, if the past reliably indicates the future, he will first denunciate me for defining “monotheism” so that it is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity (as he does on page 198). But I’ve done no such thing, not least because I haven’t defined *anything*. I have stated that monotheism implies that there is only one God—a statement Hasker says he believes: “If it can’t be maintained that there is only one God, then the claim to be monotheistic will have to be given up” (195)—and I have deduced that there is a God from that statement by deploying two logical truths (2 and 3). Moreover, I have accurately represented the relevant portion of Hasker’s trinitarianism (5 and 6) and I have expressed a necessary truth and the mind of Christians (7 and 10); otherwise, I have drawn demonstrably valid inferences in the logical system that Hasker himself endorses.

Second, he will declare me a unitarian (as he does on page 198). But I have said nothing that implies that “God is a *single* person,” a claim Hasker misattributes to me *four* times (145, 197, 198, 230), as though a monotheistic once or even a trinitarian thrice were not enough. By my lights, a freighter filled with philosophy sits between the trinitarian “God is a person” and the unitarian “God is a single person,” philosophy that’s optional for Christians, and so we must not simply assume that anyone who affirms the former must affirm the latter.

Third, he will decry my “tendency to treat classic theological texts and expressions as if they were formulas in symbolic logic” (as he does on page 197). Here, I’m afraid, Hasker has some explaining to do. For in the study of mine to which he refers, I treat Bill Craig’s work on the Trinity. As for my “formulas in symbolic logic,” I plead guilty as charged. My only defense is that I thought we were doing *analytic* theology.

On a more serious note, we can access the substantive issue on pages 196–198—which is whether or not God is a person and thus can, *inter alia*, perform intentional acts—through a little argument:

12. God = the Trinity.

13. The Trinity never performs intentional acts.

14. So, God never performs intentional acts. (from 12 and 13)

Hasker bristles at (14), but how can he deny it? After all, he repeatedly affirms (12), where what, by his lights, is rigidly designated by the singular terms flanking “=” fails to answer to his own definition of “x is a person.” Moreover, the argument is formally valid given Leibniz’s Law, which he also affirms. That leaves (13). What should we say about it? Hasker tells us that we should say two things:

(i) The Trinity performs intentional acts in the way in which “groups of agents . . . are said to perform intentional acts in virtue of such acts being performed by their members,”

and

(ii) The Trinity performs intentional acts, alright; but when we use those words, we use them analogically, not strictly and literally (197).

As for (i), we might well ask: should we *say* “groups of agents perform intentional acts in virtue of such acts being performed by their members” *because that sentence is true*, strictly and literally? If Hasker answers “yes,” then we rightly expect him to illuminate us on how it is, exactly, that a group of agents, whether a composite or community, performs an intentional act, strictly and literally, in virtue of its members performing it, despite the fact that, strictly and literally, it fails to satisfy his definition of “x is a person,” and so, strictly and literally, it cannot intend anything. And, of course, we need more than that. For in the case of God (= the Trinity), we also rightly expect Hasker to illuminate us on how, exactly, a group of persons, whether a composite or community, can, strictly and literally, perceive, know, desire, love, and be conscious, even though, strictly and literally, it is not the subject of perception, knowledge, desire, love and consciousness. Hasker, however, attempts no such illumination. I take this to be sufficient evidence of the fact that he forsakes any account of the truth of (i), spoken strictly and literally. So either (i) is off the table, or it collapses into (ii).

As for (ii), he says that, although “groups of agents . . . are *said* to perform intentional acts,” they do not *strictly and literally* perform intentional

acts; rather a group of agents is merely “regarded in some contexts, and spoken of, *as if* it were a single person,” and so a group of agents is merely “regarded in some contexts, and spoken of, *as if* it” performed intentional acts, *as if* it had properties that only persons can have (249). The same goes for the Trinity—that is, God. “[T]he Trinity [= God], while not literally a person, can nevertheless be regarded in some contexts, and spoken of, *as if* it were a single person,” and so the Trinity, that is, God, while strictly and literally incapable of performing intentional acts and strictly and literally incapable of perceiving, knowing, desiring, loving, and being conscious, can nevertheless be regarded in some contexts, and spoken of, *as if* it were capable of performing intentional acts, *as if* it were the subject of perception, knowledge, desire, love and consciousness (249).

Let’s dwell on this for a moment. According to Hasker, when we speak strictly and literally, as metaphysicians aim to speak, God never created anything; nor does God know anything, will anything, or love anyone; nor is God conscious. Indeed, Hasker goes so far as to assert—with italicized passion—that “*God cannot refer to himself [sic?], or be referred to (‘strictly and literally’) by others, using personal pronouns*” (231). So, God is not a person even in Peter van Inwagen’s minimal sense of the term (122n4). God lacks a point of view.

I propose that we find a pithy way to capture Hasker’s position on this matter. Let “x is a Chalmers zombie” mean, by definition, “x lacks consciousness”; and let “x is a Nagel zombie” mean, by definition, “x lacks a point of view.” Then Hasker’s God is a Chalmers-Nagel zombie. But at least a Chalmers-Nagel zombie can perceive, believe, desire, will, and act. Not so Hasker’s God. Hasker’s God is much, much worse off mentally than a Chalmers-Nagel zombie. Let “x is a Hasker zombie” mean, by definition, “x is a Chalmers-Nagel zombie and x otherwise lacks mentality.” Then it is more accurate to say that Hasker’s God is a Hasker zombie. Not a Hollywood zombie, not a Haitian zombie. A Hasker zombie.

So God is a Hasker zombie. Nevertheless, Hasker reassures us, it is still “more accurate” to speak *as if* God is a person, *as if* it can perform intentional acts, *as if* it knows, wills, loves, exhibits consciousness, and has a point of view. For, after all, writes Hasker, consider the alternative: “Would it be more accurate to describe the Trinity [= God] as powerless? When in fact the three Persons together exercise a single, transcendent power that can never be in conflict with itself? Or that the Trinity [= God] is ignorant, when each of the three Persons knows everything that exists to be known?” (249) Good question: *would it?* Hasker wants us to answer “No, it would not; it would be more accurate to describe God as omnipotent and omniscient than powerless and ignorant.” But, as we’ve seen, on his view, God [= the Trinity] *really is* a Hasker zombie, in which case it would be *much* more accurate to describe God as powerless and ignorant than as omnipotent and omniscient.

How could Hasker be so wrong about the implications of his view? My hypothesis is that he does not have in mind accuracy *simpliciter*, where a

statement is accurate *simpliciter* if and only if what it claims to be the case really is the case. My hypothesis is that he has in mind another sort of accuracy, what we might call “as-ifery accuracy.” If my hypothesis is correct, then we need to know, exactly, what this quality is and we need a metric for non-arbitrarily assigning more or less of it to statements. Only then can we begin to understand how it can be that it is more *as-ifery* accurate to describe God as omnipotent and omniscient instead of powerless and ignorant when we know for a fact that it is more accurate *simpliciter* to describe God as powerless and ignorant instead of omnipotent and omniscient.

Christian analytic theology is a wonderful enterprise. For, among other things, Christian analytic theologians allow us to see more starkly than ever what is at stake in our different attempts to understand the great doctrines of the Church. This is certainly true of William Hasker’s metaphysics of the Trinity. As I come away from my study of his book, two questions loom large for me. First, are we Christian analytic theologians going to follow the one we profess as our Lord and stand up and count ourselves as full-blooded monotheists, insisting that our metaphysics, logic, and philosophy more generally get in line with our profession? Yes, it is difficult to define “monotheism”; but we don’t need a definition to know that whatever else monotheism involves, it implies that there is only one God, and so it implies that there is a God. Second, is it morally permissible for Christian analytic theologians—or Christian intellectuals and leaders more generally—to adopt as-ifery in their most fundamental theorizing about the nature of God? We might approach the second question through reflection on the Church’s mission, no small part of which is expressed by the Great Commission. In this connection, let me phrase the question in a conspicuously evangelical way: can we Christians in good faith evangelize with “God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life” when we think it would be more accurate *simpliciter* to say “God does not love you and offers no plan for your life, much less a wonderful one. But don’t take it personally. God can’t love or offer anything to anyone”?

Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects, ed. Paul M. Gould. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 209 pages. \$25.99 (paperback)

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Are you the sort of philosopher who prefers desert landscapes, or lush forests? Would you gladly live in a world that contained the Platonic heavens, or would you rather decry the heavens and do without? Where