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CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM¹

Linda Zagzebski

In this paper I present an argument that there can be no more than one God in a way which allows me to give the doctrine of the Trinity logical priority over the attributes traditionally used in arguments for God's unicity. The argument that there is at most one God makes no assumptions about the particular attributes included in divinity. It uses only the Identity of Indiscernibles and a Principle of Plenitude. I then offer a theory on the relationship between individuals and kinds which allows me to offer an interpretation of the Trinity.

1. A principle of identity and four kinds of properties

Christians, of course, believe that there is but one God, and there are both philosophical and religious defenses of this doctrine. On the philosophical side there are arguments such as those of Aquinas that certain attributes constitutive of the concept of God could only apply to one being. These include self-existence, pure actuality, perfection, omnipotence, and simplicity. Each of these attributes can be used to generate an argument to the effect that it is not possible for more than one being to have such an attribute. In a recent paper William Wainwright has given very cogent and, in some cases, original arguments that monotheism is a necessary consequence of some of these attributes.² The defense of monotheism from the requirements of religion is also persuasive. Only one being could be the object of total devotion and worship. So even if God turns out not to be "the God of the philosophers" and lacks some of the traditional attributes, there is still good reason to think God wouldn't be God if he were not unique.

Christian monotheism, unlike the Islamic and Judaic varieties, which have used similar arguments for the numerical oneness of God, includes another doctrine which constrains the way Christians can argue for monotheism. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. There is numerically one God, yet there are three Persons which are correctly called 'God.' This doctrine does not seem to sit well with some of the traditional monotheistic arguments such as the ones from aseity, from omnipotence, and from simplicity. This is because these arguments are most naturally interpreted as showing not merely that at most one *being* can have an attribute such as simplicity, omnipotence, or aseity, but also that at most one *person* can have such an attribute. So, for example, the argument from omnipotence usually includes a premise to the effect that if two beings are numerically distinct and have



the capacity to will, then it is logically possible that there be a conflict in their wills. But presumably whatever reasons one has for such a principle would also be reasons for asserting the same principle with 'persons' substituted for 'beings.' In fact, Wainwright explicitly uses the term 'persons' in his argument from omnipotence.³ I am not denying that simplicity, omnipotence, and aseity are attributes, in fact, essential attributes, of the divine nature, nor that there may be sound unicity arguments which begin with one or another of these attributes. My concern is not to refute any of these arguments, but to call attention to a methodological point for a Christian philosopher. If the Trinity is a much more important belief religiously than the premises of the unicity arguments mentioned above, then it is not a good idea to begin with such premises and worry later about accommodating the Trinity to their conclusions. Instead, it should be the other way around.

Some would say that it is no wonder that the doctrine of the Trinity is not harmonious with the divine attributes since it is not harmonious with anything and that is why it is a mystery. But this seems to be too pessimistic. The Trinity is not flatly self-contradictory and there is no reason to shun the attempt to give an interpretive theory of it. In fact, it may even be important to do so. Therefore, I propose to give an argument for monotheism which makes as few assumptions as possible about the attributes included in divinity, which allows for an interpretation of the Trinity which is logically prior to the arguments for particular attributes, and which consequently better reflects the relative importance of these beliefs in Christian theology.

The argument for one God which I will give makes no particular assumptions about the attributes included in divinity. The argument in sections 2.1 and 2.2 is general enough to apply to any natural kind of thing, not only divinity. The argument in section 2.3 makes an assumption about the semantical function of 'divinity,' but no particular attribute is assumed to be included in divinity. The explanation of the Trinity in section 3 requires only the assumption that divinity includes absolute independence.

My strategy will be to argue from the Identity of Indiscernibles and a Principle of Plenitude that two Gods could not be distinguished by their properties. Arguments of this type are rejected by Wainwright in part II of "Monotheism."

(1) *The Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles*

In every possible world let \mathcal{O} be a variable ranging over complete sets H of the properties of an object in that world. For any property P , H contains either P or \bar{P} (the complement of P). Assume the minimum restrictions on the properties in H to prevent triviality.⁴ The principle can be formulated as follows:

$$\Box (x) (\mathcal{O}) [\Diamond \mathcal{O}x \rightarrow \sim \Diamond (Ey) (\mathcal{O}y \ \& \ y \neq x)]$$

This principle says that if some object x has a certain complete set of properties in one world, there is no distinct object in any world with just that set of properties. Not only does no other actual object have exactly the same set of properties as this object, but it is not even possible that some other object have this same set of properties. Any object in any world which has these properties is this object. The properties uniquely identify the object. This principle is, of course, not uncontroversial. However, it seems to me to be true and also less problematic than premises which assert that God has one or another of the “philosophers’ attributes.” That God has some of these other attributes may be derivable from the argument I will give, but that is the topic of another paper.

Before beginning the argument, I wish to distinguish four categories of properties:

Contingent property = a property which is not necessarily instantiated, though it is instantiated in at least one world.

Necessary property = a property which is instantiated in all possible worlds.

Essential property of S = a property which an individual S has in all possible worlds in which S exists.

Accidental property of S = a property which is not essential to some individual S , but which S has in some possible world.

We can also define the categories of essential and accidental properties *simpliciter*:

An *essential property* = a property which is such that necessarily it is possessed essentially by any possible object which possesses it at all.

An *accidental property* = a property which is possessed accidentally by any possible object which possesses it at all.⁵

Contingent properties may or may not be accidental to whatever beings possess them. The property of being human, for example, is contingent but not accidental. The property of being a philosopher is both contingent and accidental to all the beings who are philosophers. If a necessary being has a contingent property, it is accidental to it. This is because in some world a contingent property is not instantiated. But since a necessary being exists in all worlds, there must be some world in which such a being exists but does not have the property in question. If a necessary being has an accidental property we would probably expect it to be contingent, but it may not be if there is some other being who possesses it. In fact, that other being would not even have to have it essentially so long as in every possible world *some* being has it (e.g. being the most powerful). So it is not clear whether there are necessary properties which are accidental to God. Later I will discuss this set of properties. Wainwright maintains without argument that all God’s accidental properties must be contingent.⁶

So there are four categories of properties for each S—necessary and essential to S, necessary and accidental to S, contingent and essential to S, and contingent and accidental to S. Since a necessary being can have no contingent essential property, there are at most three categories of properties as applied to a necessary being.

2. *Why there can be only one God.*

I will use 'God' not as a proper name, but as a descriptive designator applying to whatever being or beings are divine. The question, then, is whether two beings can be divine. I will argue that the answer is no, though a qualification about the status of internal essential relations leaves room for an interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

2.1. Why two Gods could not differ only in a contingent property.

Any contingent property of a God would also have to be accidental to it since there are no contingent properties essential to a necessary being and I am assuming that any God is a necessary being. Wainwright says that he can see no reason to think two necessary beings couldn't be distinguished on the basis of a difference in contingent accidental properties.⁷ However, I think there is an argument which does provide such a reason. Before presenting the argument, the logical connections between an object and its accidental properties should be made clear. I am assuming that what we mean by an accidental property entails the following principle:

(2) *First Principle of Plenitude* (PP1)

If some property P1 is compatible with the set of essential properties E of an object O, and if O has $\bar{P}1$ in some world w, there is another world w' in which O has P1 and is as similar to w as is compatible with O's having P1 in w'.

The intuition behind PP1 is that every property which is compatible with the essence of an object is something it is possible for it to have. Furthermore, given some possible world in which it lacks that property, it is possible for it to possess it even though everything else remains as much the same as is logically possible. So the essence of an object alone sets the limits of the possible properties of that object. It is assumed, though, that the essential properties of an object include the necessary truths. So, for example, each object is essentially such that $2 + 2 = 4$, the Identity of Indiscernibles holds, etc.

The same intuition allows us to form a parallel principle for pairs of objects as follows:

(3) *Second Principle of Plenitude (PP2)*

If properties P1 and P2 are respectively compatible with the set of essential properties E1 and E2 of objects O1 and O2 respectively, and if in some possible world w O1 has P1 and O2 has P2, and O1's having P1 is compossible with O2's having P2, then there is another possible world w' in which O1 has P1 and O2 has P2, and which is as similar to w as is compatible with O1's having P1 and O2's having P2.

From (1), (3) and the hypothesis that two divine beings can differ only in a contingent accidental property and what is entailed by that difference, we can derive a contradiction as follows:

1. Assume the principles of the Identity of Indiscernibles (II) and the Second Principle of Plenitude (PP2).

2. Suppose that there is a world w1 in which God 1 and God 2 have all necessary properties in common. They therefore have the same set of essential properties, and also the same set of necessary accidental properties, if there are any of this kind. They differ only in contingent property C1. God 1 has C1; God 2 has $\bar{C}1$.

3. Since God 1 and God 2 have the same essence E, there is nothing in E which precludes God 2 from having C1 and there is nothing in E which precludes God 1 from having $\bar{C}1$.

4. By PP2 there is another world w2 where God 2 has C1 and God 1 has $\bar{C}1$, and w2 is as much like w1 as is compatible with God 2's having C1 and God 1's having $\bar{C}1$.

5. This contradicts II twice over. The complete set of properties H1 which God 1 has in w1 is possessed by God 2 in w2, and the complete set of properties H2 which God 2 has in w1 is possessed by God 1 in w2. There is nothing which makes God 1 God 1 and God 2 God 2 if what is unique about each is something the other one could have had instead.

6. The hypothesis that two divine beings can differ only in a contingent property and what is entailed by it is therefore false.

By the same reasoning it can be shown that two Gods cannot differ only in some set of contingent accidental properties. The reason is just that if any member of a set of properties is contingent, so is the set. The argument is parallel to the ones above except that C1 and $\bar{C}1$ stand for sets of contingent properties.

2.2 Why two Gods cannot differ only in a necessary accidental property.

It is not clear that it is possible for a property to be necessary but accidental to God. The only candidates that come to mind are comparative properties such

as being such that no other being is more powerful. If there is power in some world, there ought to be the greatest degree of it, though, of course it is an open question whether more than one being instantiates the greatest degree, and the same goes for benevolence, mercy and any other property that admits of degree. So there are candidates for properties that are instantiated in every possible world, but in different beings in different worlds. But why should every world have a most powerful being? It would have such a being only if power is necessarily instantiated. One reason power might be necessarily instantiated is if it is included or entailed by the essential properties of some necessary being. So then the putative property must be essential to at least one being. If it is essential to anyone, we would expect it to be essential to God, though this is probably not obvious. There is, though, at least some reasonable doubt that there is any property that is necessary but accidental to God. And if there is no such property, then, of course, there can be no question of two Gods differing in the possession of such a property. However, assuming that there is a property of this kind, we can still construct an argument parallel to the one in the last section for the conclusion that two Gods could not differ only in such a property and what is entailed by that difference:

1. Assume II and PP2.
2. Suppose that in world w_1 God 1 and God 2 have all essential properties in common and all contingent accidental properties in common. They differ only in necessary accidental property N_1 . God 1 has N_1 ; God 2 has \bar{N}_1 .
3. Since God 1 and God 2 have the same essence, God 1 is not precluded by his essence from having N_1 , nor is God 2 precluded by his essence from having \bar{N}_1 .
4. By PP2 there is another possible world w_2 in which God 1 has \bar{N}_1 and God 2 has N_1 , and which is as much like w_1 as is compatible with God 1's having N_1 and God 2's having N_1 .
5. But this contradicts II twice over. The complete set of properties H_1 which God 1 has in w_1 is possessed by God 2 in w_2 , and the complete set of properties H_2 which God 2 has in w_1 is possessed by God 1 in w_2 .
6. Therefore, two divine beings cannot differ only in a necessary accidental property and what is entailed by that difference.

By the same reasoning two Gods cannot differ in some set of necessary accidental properties. The argument is exactly parallel to the one above except that N_1 and \bar{N}_1 stand for sets of necessary accidental properties.

Therefore, though it is not clear that there are any necessary accidental properties, if there are, God 1 and God 2 cannot differ in those properties alone since the supposition that they do violates the two principles I have proposed, a principle of identity and a principle of plenitude.

In addition, a parallel argument can be used to show that two Gods cannot

differ in any combination of contingent and necessary accidental properties. Any difference of accidental properties would lead to the consequence that there exists a world in which God 1 has exactly the same set of properties as those possessed by God 2 in some other world. But by the foregoing argument this is impossible. Therefore, since God 1 and God 2 cannot differ in any set of contingent or necessary accidental properties, they cannot differ merely in accidental properties at all.

If the argument in this and the previous sections are right, they show not only that two Gods cannot differ only in accidental properties, but that no two beings of any sort can differ only in accidental properties. No two individual objects can share exactly the same set of essential properties. There are, therefore, individual essences. The implications of this consequence for metaphysics are interesting and I have examined them elsewhere,⁸ but for the purposes of this paper I wish to concentrate only on its application to a divine being.

So if there are two Gods, they must differ in some essential property. Since by hypothesis both Gods are divine, if there are two Gods, one has an essential property which is not part of the divine essence which the other one lacks. The next section will propose an argument that this is not possible.

2.3. Why two Gods cannot differ in an essential property.

Wainwright says, "It is not clear why two necessary beings could not be distinguished by a difference in their essential properties, that is, it is not clear why two necessary beings must have the *same* essential properties. Indeed, if the doctrine of the Trinity is coherent, the thesis is false."⁹ In this section I will try to show why two divine necessary beings cannot be distinguished by their essential properties, though in section 3 an exception will be made for essential internal relations, the properties which distinguish the members of the Trinity from each other. I will then give an interpretation of the relation between objects and their properties which does not preclude the persons of the Trinity from being numerically one being.

The argument that two Gods could not differ in an essential property rests on a particular view of the function of the concept of divinity. It seems clear that we have a variety of ways of referring to a God, either directly or by description. When we use the name 'God' we may mean to refer directly to the being those in our religious community worship, or we may mean to refer indirectly to whatever being or beings have some attribute or attributes we are considering such as omnipotence, omniscience, or perfection. The concept of divinity, though, is used when we wish to refer to the *nature* of such a being or beings, and when it is asked whether there can be two Gods or two divine beings what is meant is whether two beings can share such a nature. Divinity, then, can refer

to either the nature of the being those in our religious community worship, picked out by a direct reference, or alternatively, it can refer indirectly to the nature of whatever being or beings has some particular attributes.

I will argue that 'divinity' must refer to the *complete* nature of such a being. Divinity includes the complete set of properties essential to any divine being. so even though we may sometimes fix the reference of 'God' by such descriptions as 'the being we worship' or 'the absolutely perfect creator of the universe,' we use 'divinity' to refer to the whole nature of such a being. I have two arguments for this claim. One appeals to the way the term is actually used, while the other is purely theoretical.

Consider first some features of the ways 'divinity' and 'God' are actually used. Sometimes 'God' refers directly to a particular individual whom we come to know by revelation or the religious experience of our faith community. Call such an individual 'Yahweh.' Suppose we come to believe that Yahweh is essentially good. If it were possible for Yahweh to have essential properties which are not included in divinity, then we would expect there to be a theological debate over the question of whether goodness is included in the properties which constitute divinity or whether it is essential only to Yahweh. But we do not have such a debate. In practice, if some property P is taken to be essential to Yahweh that is *ipso facto* assumed to be sufficient to show it is essential to (any) God.

The same observation holds for those uses of 'God' in which 'God' is taken to refer indirectly to whatever being or beings have some particular attribute such as absolute perfection, omnipotence, or independence. If it is discovered through some argument that such a being must have some other essential attribute, say omniscience, this attribute also is taken to be constitutive of divinity. In fact, it seems to me that this procedure and the one mentioned in the previous paragraph are two important ways we *find out* what properties are contained in divinity. It seems, then, that our usage of 'God' and 'divinity' supports my position. Though there have been discussion in which it was taken to be an open question whether Yahweh's possession of some essential property P is necessary for P's being a divine attribute, it is almost always taken to be sufficient. Divinity, then, includes all the essential properties of a particular divine being. It follows that no two divine beings can differ in an essential property.

The second argument for this position is theoretical. It seems plausible that the existence of individual essential differences among members of a natural kind indicate that such individuals fall short of the perfection of the kind. Suppose, for example, that humanity is a proper subset of the essential properties of individual humans; that is, humans possess individual essences. This suggests that no individual human possesses the whole of humanity. Contained in the identity of each is a way of being human which is not possessed by any other. If a being were essentially everything a human could be there would only be

one human. The same point can be made even if the idea of individual essences is unacceptable. All we need do is switch the discussion to higher-order natural kinds such as the kind Rational Creature. It is reasonable to think of Rational Creature as a higher-level kind under which the kinds Angel and Human fall. But the fact that there are properties constitutive of being human and hence, essential to individual humans which are distinct from some of the properties essential to angels suggests that neither the kind Human nor the kind Angel exhausts the kind Rational Creature. Only one set of essential properties could exhaust the kind Rational Creature, so if more than one perfectly rational creature existed, they would have the same set of essential properties.

If divinity can be considered a natural kind by analogy with the kind Rational Creature, and if it is assumed that any divine being contains the whole of divinity, or is perfectly divine, this means that two divine beings could not differ in an essential property. Since it was shown in the previous section that two divine beings could not differ in an accidental property, it follows that two divine beings could not differ at all. Therefore, by the Identity of Indiscernibles, there is only one God.

3. *The Trinity*

The proper use of reason in placing the doctrine of the Trinity within a general metaphysical interpretation of such concepts as essence, attribute, person, and numerical identity is a difficult and sensitive issue. It seems to me, though, that Aquinas was right in saying that what we can expect from reason in a discussion and defense of the Trinity is quite different from what we can expect from reason in an argument for the unicity of God. To put it briefly, for the latter we can expect fairly cogent direct arguments, whereas for the former we can hope only for a coherent explanation.¹⁰ In this section it will be necessary to assume that the attribute of absolute independence is included in divinity.

In attempting an explanation of the Trinity I will present a theory on the relationship between individuals and their properties. This theory will be used to suggest a criterion for distinctness between individual beings which allows for a unique case in which numerically identical beings differ in some essential internal relations.

3.1. The distinction between an attribute, which is expressed by a simple, one-place predicate, and the general category of properties.

What I call a simple one-place predicate stands for a property which is non-relational in two senses. First, it does not purport to relate the object to another object, and second, it does not purport to relate the object to a moment or

moments of time. I call the first sense in which a predicate can be relational object-relational (rel_o), and the second sense time-relational (rel_t).

Let us define the notions of non- rel_o and non- rel_t as follows:

To say that a predicate \mathcal{O} is non- rel_o is to say that for any x , the result of predicating \mathcal{O} of x does not entail the existence of any object that is not entailed by saying of x that it exists.

To say that a predicate \mathcal{O} is non- rel_t is to say that necessarily for any x , if the result of predicating \mathcal{O} of x is true at one moment of time, it is true at every moment of time at which x exists.

When I say that R entails S I mean that it is impossible in the broadly logical or metaphysical sense for R to be true and S to be false. If R entails S then the truth of R depends upon the truth of S .

We can define the notion of a simple one-place predicate as follows:

A predicate \mathcal{O} is a simple one-place predicate $\leftrightarrow \mathcal{O}$ is non- rel_o , is non- rel_t , and is simple in structure. Let us call the property expressed by a simple one-place predicate an *attribute*.

To have a simple structure would ordinarily mean that it is a single word. Such a predicate cannot have a complex structure, nor can it be an abbreviation of an expression with a complex structure. Predicates that are non- rel_o and non- rel_t would include 'human,' 'water,' 'daffodil,' 'is either awake or asleep,' and 'is such that if it doesn't exist, then it exists.' With the criterion of simplicity added, the last two examples would be excluded. The criterion of simplicity is intended to remove contrived properties, Boolean combinations of other properties which intuitively are not what was intended by the classical notion of a property (e.g. being either a fish or a worm).

Examples of predicates that are non- rel_o but rel_t are 'blue,' 'asleep,' 'tadpole,' and 'is either angry or frightened.' Examples of predicates that are rel_o but non- rel_t are 'carnivorous' and 'was born after Christ.' Predicates that are both rel_o and rel_t include 'philosopher,' 'squash player,' and 'is decorated with flowers.' 'Mother' is rel_o and has two senses, one rel_t , one not. The first is the sense in which we say that a woman becomes a mother only when her child is born. The second is the sense in which we call a woman the mother of someone timelessly.

It is my position that the category of predicates I have just defined pick out what we intuitively consider to be natural kind terms, though it is not important for the purposes of this paper to insist on this point. The paradigm cases of natural kind terms fit this category. Some questionable ones such as artifact terms may also fit it, though I do not believe any clearly non-natural kind terms are simple one-place predicates in my sense. In the case of a contingent temporal

object we usually think that either it falls under a unique natural kind or that if it falls under more than one, they are related as species and genus. On my view it is possible for an object to fall under more than one natural kind when the definition of the kind includes a set of distinct properties. Each of those properties is an attribute and would in turn define a natural kind. So each of us primarily falls under the natural kind Human Being, but if such a kind includes both rationality and temporality as defining characteristics, we would also fall under the natural kind Rational Being, as well as the kind Temporal Being. So when an object falls under more than one natural kind, they are connected by relations of entailment from one primary kind. To be human entails that one is an animal, and it entails that one is a rational being.

Contingent objects will include in the class of their attributes those which relate the object to other objects without which the object cannot exist. This is because no contingent object is purely independent. Consider some particular daffodil. For this daffodil to exist certain other things must exist as a matter of physical necessity—earth, air, water, light, and so on. Perhaps this particular earth, air, water, and sunlight is not necessary, but certainly something is which provides for the plant what these things provide. What this plant needs as a matter of logical necessity is much more difficult to answer. It seems that we could imagine a possible world in which daffodils grow without water, light, and so on, but perhaps it would be incorrect to call them daffodils, but only something ‘like’ daffodils. A stronger case could be made for the claim that a given daffodil could not exist, i.e., it is logically impossible that it exist, unless matter of a certain kind existed. Many philosophers would even say that the particular matter of which this daffodil is composed is logically necessary to it. It could not exist without it. So a given daffodil cannot exist unless other things of certain kinds exist, and its existence may even be dependent upon the existence of other particulars such as other daffodils, this matter, etc. In each case predicating the natural kind term ‘daffodil’ of a daffodil entails the existence of other objects. But it does not entail the existence of any object not entailed by the *de re* predication of existence to the daffodil. ‘Daffodil,’ therefore, is non-rel_o.

Furthermore, each contingent object, including, of course, each of us, cannot exist without God. This means that to say of me that I exist entails the existence of that being without whom I could not exist. So all contingent objects have relationality built into them. Their one-place predicates express this. Again on my view essential relations, i.e. relations which an object has in every world in which it exists such as ‘is created by God,’ express properties which are non-rel_o.

God also has attributes in the technical sense I have defined. Many of the traditional attributes would probably qualify as attributes in my sense as well, though some of them might not. If objects of knowledge exist apart from God, and if omniscience entails the existence of such objects, then God’s omniscience

is not an attribute in my sense, though God could still be omniscient. Being the creator would not be an attribute, though omnipotence, goodness, simplicity, freedom, immutability, and impassibility, would all be candidates. (The last four are probably actually second-order attributes, or attributes of attributes.)

Unlike the attributes of all other beings, the predication of an attribute of God does not entail the existence of any distinct object at all. It does not entail the existence of any contingent object. Furthermore, it does not entail the existence of a distinct necessary object. God's non-relational properties cannot entail the existence of any distinct being because that is to say it is impossible for God to exist without that other being and that would make God dependent, contrary to the assumption of this section. So none of God's attributes entail the existence of anything but God. Since the predication of attributes to God entails the existence of necessary objects such as numbers, it follows that such necessary objects are not distinct from God.

God is therefore unique among all other beings, including all other necessary beings. The predication of attributes to any being other than God entails the existence of something distinct from that being, and in every case it entails the existence of God. God is, of course, more than a number, so to say the existence of numbers entails the existence of God is to say the existence of numbers entails the existence of something distinct from, or more precisely, something over and above, themselves. But to say the existence of God entails the existence of numbers is not to say the existence of God entails the existence of anything distinct from or over and above himself. I am not proposing any particular theory on the nature of necessary objects other than God and the way in which they depend upon God's nature. It is natural to think of them as objects in his mind or something of the sort, but I am suggesting only that they are not independent beings; they are not distinct from God himself.

3.2. Relational properties in the divinity

Relational properties can be either internal or external. Call the set of attributes of some object A \emptyset . Let us define an internal relation of A as a relation which does not entail the existence of anything other than an object which possesses \emptyset . So relations to other beings in the same natural kind are internal relations in my sense. An external relation of A is a relation which entails the existence of an object which possesses some properties not contained in \emptyset . It was argued in section 2.3 that two Gods could not differ in their essential properties and that would include, presumably, any essential relations. But the distinction just drawn between internal and external essential relations has an interesting consequence when applied to God.

Let us review some of the important differences between the way God is

related to his properties and we are related to ours. First of all, none of God's attributes entail the existence of any distinct being, whereas our attributes, and the attributes of all contingent beings, do. This follows immediately from the notion that divinity entails complete independence, and created or contingent beings entail dependence. This feature of the relation between God and his attributes distinguishes him not only from beings that are contingent in the sense of existing in only some possible worlds, but it also distinguishes him from other necessary beings. Beings like numbers are necessary in the sense that they exist in all possible worlds, but they are nevertheless dependent beings which owe their existence to God and are not distinct from God.

Another difference in the relation between God and his attributes and the relation between us and our attributes is that two contingent objects A and B can share one-place properties, but the existence of A entails the existence of different objects that are entailed by the existence of B. These differences in entailment generate criteria of distinctness between the different members of the kind. So each daffodil entails the existence of different particulars, though the relation between each daffodil and the particulars its existence entails is formally the same since they are in the same natural kind. In the case of God, however, no other particular is entailed by God's existence. Therefore, there can be no distinction between one God and another on the basis of different entailments. Different members of an ordinary natural kind will be alike in their attributes, though each attribute when applied to a particular member of the kind will entail the existence of different particulars. This leads to the conclusion that different members of the same natural kind have different essential external relations (relations to things outside the kind). In God, however, there are no essential external relations.

In the case of ordinary natural kinds, the members of the kind differ in their internal relations as well (their relations to other members of the kind). But it can never happen that two contingent objects which are members of the same natural kind and hence have the same attributes differ only in their essential internal relations. They will always differ as well in their essential external relations. For this reason, the criterion of distinctness for individual beings which belong to the same natural kind and hence have the same attributes, is difference of essential external relations. We can use this to formulate a criterion of distinctness for individual objects:

Criterion of Object Distinctness

If object *a* and object *b* belong to the same natural kind, then if *a* is distinct from *b*, there exists some relation *R* and object *x* outside the natural kind to which *a* and *b* belong, such that aRx and $\sim bRx$.

On this criterion for distinctness between individuals with the same attributes,

there can be only one God and the different members of the Trinity are numerically one individual being. On the other hand, the fact that they differ in internal essential relations means that there is *some* important difference of individual being. The tradition, of course, calls it a difference of person since the only differences between the members of the Trinity are person-like characteristics.¹¹

Could there be other internal essential relations between the members of the Trinity in which they differ other than the ones which are traditionally used to distinguish Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? I cannot think of any reason of logic which would prevent such a possibility, though perhaps the lack of such a distinction might be argued from the Principle of Sufficient Reason. In any case, I think it reasonable to say that we get our concept of identity for individuals from contingent objects or other dependent beings, and on this concept, differences in internal essential relations do not by themselves give a difference of object identity, though they obviously give a difference of identity in some other sense. This other sense is what is intended by the distinction within the Trinity.

Though the persons of the Trinity do not differ in essential external relations, they will differ in accidental external relations. For example, the accidental property of being prayed to by Anselm may be a property of the Father, not the Son. This would be the case if Anselm prays to the Father *qua* Father, i.e. his intentional state is essentially connected to his perception of God as having that property which distinguishes him from the Son. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit differ in some essential relational properties, then they will also differ in some accidental relational properties. This is not a problem, though, since accidental relational properties do not figure in the identity of a being. The only problematic ones are the essential relational properties, and I have argued that these are important enough to give a difference of person, though not of numerical being.

I concluded from the discussion in sections 2.1 and 2.2 that two Gods cannot differ in an accidental property, whether contingent or necessary. In section 2.3 I argued that two Gods could not differ in an essential property. Hence, by the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, there can be only one God. In section 3 I presented a theory of things and kinds which, when combined with the assumption that God is absolutely independent of all other beings, allows us to conclude that in the single case of divinity, being A can have exactly the same essential external relations as being B, and hence, be numerically identical with B, though A and B differ in essential internal relations. The identity of A and B, therefore, differs in some sense of identity. It is plausible to call this a difference of persons. I conclude that though in a plausible sense of being there is at most one divine being, the Trinity is not contrary to reason.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to a number of people for their kind and very helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper, including Alvin Plantinga, Philip Quinn, Richard Swinburne, Robert Adams, Norman Kretzmann, William Wainwright, James Hanink, Peter van Inwagen, Stephen Davis, and Charles Taliaferro.

2. William Wainwright, "Monotheism," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, eds., Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 289-314.

3. *ibid.*, p. 302.

4. This excludes any property of being identical with one of the individuals in the domain of the individual variables picked out by a *de re* reference, such as being-identical-with-Socrates. It also excludes any world-indexed property uniquely satisfied by an individual, such as being-the-first-president-of-the-U.S.-in-alpha.

5. There may be properties which are essential to possible object S yet accidental to possible object R. If so, there are properties which are neither essential properties simpliciter nor accidental properties simpliciter.

6. Wainwright, p. 293, n. 8.

7. *ibid.*, p. 293.

8. "Individual Essences and the Creation," in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, Cornell Univ. Press, 1988.

9. Wainwright, p. 292.

10. Aquinas writes:

Reason may be employed in two ways to establish a point: firstly, for the purpose of furnishing sufficient proof of some principle, as in natural science, where sufficient proof can be brought to show that the movement of the heavens is always of uniform velocity. Reason is employed in another way, not as furnishing a sufficient proof of a principle, but as confirming an already established principle, by showing the congruity of its results, as in astrology the theory of eccentrics and epicycles is considered as established, because thereby the sensible appearances of the heavenly movements can be explained; not, however, as if this proof were sufficient, forasmuch as some other theory might explain them. In the first way we can prove that God is one, and the like. In the second way, reasons avail to prove the Trinity; as when assumed to be true, such reasons confirm it.

We must not, however, think that the Trinity of persons is adequately proved by such reasons. (ST Z 32, Art 1, Reply Obj. 2).

11. As Aquinas expresses it:

Therefore *person* in any nature signifies what is distinct in that nature; thus in human nature it signifies this flesh, these bones, and this soul, which are the individuating principles of a man, and which, though not belonging to *person* in general, nevertheless do belong to the meaning of a particular human person.

Now distinction in god is only by relation of origin, as stated above (Q 28, A 2, 3) while relation in God is not as an accident in a subject, but is the divine essence itself; and so is subsistent, for the divine essence subsists. (ST Pt. 1, Q29, Art 4).

Now as there is no quantity of God, for He is great without quantity, as Augustine says (De Trin. i 1) it follows that a real relation in God can be based only on action. Such relations are not based on the actions of God according to any extrinsic procession, forasmuch as the relations of God to creatures are not real in Him. Hence, it follows that real relations in God can be understood only in regard to those actions according to which there are internal, and not external, processions in God. These processions are two only, as above expounded, one derived from the action of the intellect, the procession of the Word; and the other from the action of the will, the procession of love. (Q 28, Art 4, pt.1)