

Trinity

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The doctrine of the Trinity is central to Christian theology. The part of the doctrine that concerns us here may be stated in these words: although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are different persons, each is the same God as the other; they are not three Gods, but exactly one God.

These words arguably imply a contradiction. For example, if the Father is not the same person as the Son, then the Father is not identical with the Son; thus, if each is a God, there are at least two Gods, which contradicts the claim that there is exactly one God. Analytic theologians have responded to this line of argument and others related to it. Each response aims to model a consistent doctrine of the Trinity, one that provides the resources to reject such arguments while retaining Trinitarian orthodoxy. We can classify these attempts by distinguishing those according to which there is no numerical sameness without identity from those according to which there is numerical sameness without identity. Attempts in the first group tend to raise worries about consistency with orthodoxy. Attempts in the second group tend to raise worries about intelligibility.

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1. The logical problem of the Trinity

The words ‘the Trinity’ are the English equivalent of the Latin word *Trinitas*, which was coined by the early Christian writer Tertullian. *Trinitas*, which means something like ‘the tripleness’, is used to refer collectively to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the words ‘the Persons’ is also used in this way. Tertullian was also the originator of the use of the word ‘person’ (*persona*) as a common noun that applies to each of the Persons. Outside theology, the Latin word means a mask of the sort worn by characters in a classical drama, and, by extension, a *dramatis persona*, a character in a drama. What Tertullian intended to suggest by applying *persona* to each of the Persons is disputed. Theologians writing in Latin have generally said that, although God is a single *substantia*, there are in God three *personae*. Theologians writing in Greek have generally said that, although God is a single *ousia*, there are in God three *hypostases*. These two pairs of terms have caused some confusion since *substantia* and *hypostasis* have the same literal or etymological meaning: ‘that which stands under’.

We will focus on the mainly logical difficulties presented by the ‘developed’ doctrine of the Trinity as it appears in the Athanasian Creed, *circa* AD 500. For historical and theological matters, see among other primary sources Tertullian’s *Against Praxeas*, the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers - Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus - and Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*. See also Brown 1985, Hill 1985, Hodgson 1940, Kelly 1964 and 1978 and Stead 1977.

According to the Creed, ‘the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God’, that is, ‘each person by himself is God’; nevertheless, ‘they are not three Gods, but one God’. These words seem to imply that (i) each of the Persons is a person, (ii) each of the Persons is the same God as each other, and (iii) there is exactly one God. The Creed also states that ‘there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit’; furthermore, ‘[t]he Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten: but proceeding’. These words seem to imply that (iv) none of the Persons is the same person as each other, and (v) some things are true of each person that are not true of any other. In stating all these things, the Creed claims that it is not ‘dividing the substance’. Roughly, the substance is divided if either there is more than one primary substance (individual or being) in the vicinity of the Trinity or there is more than one secondary substance (nature or essence).

There are different formulations of the logical problem of the Trinity. They differ in the ways in which they conclude that a contradiction arises and, depending on the model of the Trinity on offer, they require different responses.

One formulation of the logical problem of the Trinity uses ‘God’ as a count noun, the ‘is’ of predication, and proceeds as follows. (1.1) The Father is the same God as the Son. (1.2) If so, then the Father is a God, the Son is a God, and the Father is identical with the Son. Therefore, the Father is identical with the Son. However, (1.3) the Father is not the same person as the Son. (1.4) If so, then the Father is *not* identical with the Son, which leads to a contradiction. (Unless otherwise indicated, the word “identical” and its cognates in the present article stand for what logicians call “absolute identity”. See Identity.)

A second formulation uses ‘God’ as a proper name and the ‘is’ of identity. (2.1) The Father is God. (2.2) The Son is God. (2.3) If so, then the Father is the Son. (2.4) But some things are true of the Son that are not true of the Father. Therefore, by Leibniz’s Law (see Identity of Indiscernibles, section xxx), the Father is not the Son, which leads to a contradiction.

A third formulation focuses on the number of Gods. (3.1) Some things are true of the Son that are not true of the Father. Therefore, by Leibniz’s Law, (3.2) the Father is not the Son. (3.3) The Father is a God. (3.4) The Son is a God. (3.5) If the Father is not the Son and each is a God, there are at least two Gods. But (3.6) there is exactly one God, which leads to a contradiction.

This entry will consider five recent attempts by analytic theologians to model a consistent and orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, each of which aims to provide the resources to answer these three formulations of the logical problem of the Trinity. We can classify models of the Trinity as (i) those according to which there is no numerical sameness without identity, including models offered by Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, and Brian Leftow, and (ii) those according to which there is numerical sameness without identity, including models offered by Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, and Peter van Inwagen. Models in the first group tend to raise worries about orthodoxy. Specifically, critics regard them as tending toward polytheism (there is more than one God), modalism (the Persons are ways that God is or acts or functions or presents himself), or some other heterodoxy, e.g. ‘dividing the substance’. Models in the second group tend to raise worries about intelligibility.

2. There is no numerical sameness without identity: Swinburne

According to Swinburne (1994), the Persons are not identical and each of them is a God; each of them is a metaphysically simple immaterial individual substance necessarily possessed of the divine attributes. Thus, says Swinburne, there are three Gods; indeed, necessarily, there are exactly three Gods (170-180). For, first of all, there being only one God is a worse state of affairs than there being exactly two Gods; that's because the second state of affairs involves two Gods loving each other. A solitary God would, therefore, be constrained by his perfect goodness to prefer it. He therefore would create—eternally, of course, not at some point in time—a second God. Moreover, there being exactly two Gods is a worse state of affairs than there being exactly three Gods; that's because the second state of affairs involves two Gods cooperatively loving a third God. Two Gods would, therefore, be constrained by their perfect goodness to prefer it. They therefore would create—again, eternally—a third God. Why not four Gods? Because '[t]here is a qualitative difference between sharing and co-operating in sharing', but 'no similar qualitative difference between co-operating with one in sharing and co-operating with two' (179). Swinburne identifies the first God with the Father, the second with the Son, and the third with the Holy Spirit. The ontological priority of the Father gives him authority over the others, with the consequence that, necessarily, they conform their wills to his in matters about which a solitary God would have a free choice. The wills of the three Gods, therefore, can never conflict. Moreover, 'the three together form a whole'—'together constitute' 'the same individual thing' (3, 182, 185). That whole 'is such that each of its members is necessarily everlasting, and would not have existed unless it had brought about or been brought about by the others' (180-181). The proper name 'God' applies to this 'whole thing' (187n20). Finally, the Athanasian Creed's claim that there is only one God 'is to be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity' (181); and the claim of the Nicene Creed that the Father is *homoousia* with the Son (of the same substance with the Son) is to be read either as the claim that they are both Gods, exemplifying the same nature, or as the claim that they are both 'members' or 'parts' of the 'whole thing' that is God (185).

If Swinburne's model is correct, then the following premises of our formulations of the logical problem of the Trinity are false: (1.1) the Father is the same God as the Son, (2.1) the Father is God, (2.2) the Son is God, and (3.6) there is exactly one God.

Swinburne's model is arguably unorthodox, for at least four reasons. First, the Athanasian Creed states that the Son and the Holy Spirit were neither created nor made. Swinburne denies this. Second, the Creed prohibits 'dividing the substance' but Swinburne divides it both ways. On his model, the Persons are distinct parts of a fourth individual that is God (187n7)—that is three too many primary substances for orthodoxy. Moreover, on his model, each of the Persons is a God but God is not a God since, 'to speak strictly', 'it' is not omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, etc.—that is one too many secondary substances for orthodoxy (181). Third, the Creed states that 'they are not three Gods, but one God'. Swinburne says they are three Gods. Fourth, on Swinburne's model, God is not a person; orthodoxy says God is a person.

In reply to the first charge, Swinburne contends that 'early church theologians and scholastics thought of "creates" as applicable only to the bringing about of something finite by an act of will.... "Made" for them meant made out of some pre-existing matter' (183). If, however, the word 'create' and 'made' are used in senses that lack these implications, which is how they are used in contemporary English, nothing contrary to orthodoxy is implied by 'the Father

creates the Son'. As for the second and third charges, Swinburne says that '[t]here is an ambiguity in the Greek and Latin of the creeds, which justifies a different understanding of [*theos*] and *deus* (normally both translated into English as 'God') in different places in the creeds' (181). Both words can be used to predicate divinity or to pick out 'the, in some sense, unique Supreme Being'. Thus, when the Athanasian Creed states that 'the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God' and 'each person by himself is God', 'is God' is used to predicate divinity of the Father, etc., whereas when the Creed states of the persons that 'they are not three Gods, but one God', 'God' is used to refer to the Supreme Being (186). If the doctrine of the Trinity is not understood in such a way, says Swinburne, it is 'manifestly contradictory' and no authorities 'affirming something which they intend to be taken with utter seriousness can be read as affirming an *evident* contradiction' (180). As for the fourth charge, Swinburne insists that, on his model, God is divine, although he denies that 'it [God] is divine in exactly the same sense as the persons are divine' (187n21). The critic might wonder what sense of 'divine' Swinburne has in mind since, on his model, the unique Supreme Being has no more personal properties than *limax cinereoniger*.

3. *There is no numerical sameness without identity: Craig*

Craig insists that there is exactly one God, which he thinks of as 'a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each sufficient for personhood' (2003: 594). Thought of in this way, 'God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of consciousness, intentionality and volition': the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (2003: 594). To avert polytheism, Craig says that exactly one individual substance has 'the divine nature', a nature that includes the property of *being triune*, and that substance is God. None of the Persons instantiates that property, and so none of them instantiates the divine nature and none of them is a God; only God is a God. But, says Craig, they are 'fully and unambiguously' divine; therefore, 'there is more than one way to be divine' (2003: 590). Craig used to try to explain this by saying that just as something has the property of being feline if it is a cat *or* a distinctive natural part of a cat, so something has the property of being divine if it is God *or* a distinctive natural part of God, which each of the persons is (2003: 591; 2009: 128-129). More recently, Craig expresses ambivalence about whether the Persons are parts of God. Instead, he says that each of them is 'indisputably divine' since 'they are God's persons and are omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, worthy of worship, and so forth' (2006: 110). We focus on the version of his model according to which, unlike Swinburne's model, God is *not* a whole of which the persons are parts but rather a single soul endowed with three sets of faculties each of which is sufficient for being a person.

If Craig's model is correct, then (1.1) the Father is the same God as the Son, (3.3) the Father is a God, and (3.4) the Son is a God are all false because neither the Father nor the Son is a God. Moreover, (2.1) the Father is God and (2.2) the Son is God are both false because God is triune but neither the Father nor the Son is triune.

Craig's view is arguably both inconsistent and unorthodox. It is inconsistent because on the model (i) there exists exactly one individual substance in the vicinity of the Trinity, namely God, (ii) God is not identical with any of the Persons and, yet (iii) given Craig's own account of what an individual substance is, each of the Persons is an individual substance (Howard-Snyder 2003: 393-395). It is unorthodox for two reasons. First, it contradicts the Athanasian Creed, which states that the Father is the same God as the Son, which implies that the Father is a God and the Son is a God; on Craig's model neither is a God. Moreover, the Creed

prohibits dividing the substance, but Craig divides it both ways. On his model, there are two ways to be divine—which is one too many for orthodoxy. Moreover, on his model, there are four individual substances—which is three too many for orthodoxy. Second, orthodoxy holds that God is omnipotent, etc.; but, on Craig’s model, God is not a person, and so God is not omnipotent, etc. (Howard-Snyder 2003: 399-401).

In reply to the inconsistency charge, Craig modifies his account of individual substances and claims that the Persons each lack ‘the “stand alone” quality that something must have to be a substance’ (2006: 113). Craig does not explain what this “stand alone” quality is. But if it involves being capable of existing without anything else existing, then God lacks it too; after all, God cannot exist without the Persons. In that case, there are *no* individual substances on Craig’s model (a limiting case of ‘dividing the substance’).

As for the first concern about orthodoxy, Craig dismisses creedal formulations that are inconsistent with his account, when they have no Scriptural basis (2003: 592ff). As for the second concern, Craig agrees that, on his model, God is not a person; but, he says, ‘[t]hat is part and parcel of Trinitarian orthodoxy.... The Church has uniformly rejected the claim of modalists and other unitarians that God is a person’ (2006: 105). Nevertheless, he says, God still has the properties of omnipotence, etc.; for ‘God can have them if God is a soul possessing the rational faculties sufficient for personhood’.

Regarding Craig’s reply to the second concern, the critic is apt to make two points. First, the Church has never rejected the claim that God is *a* person, as witnessed by its Scriptures, creeds, liturgies, prayers, and hymns that refer to God with personal pronouns and that predicate and presuppose properties of God only a person can have. Rather, the Church rejects the claim that God is *one* person. Second, according to Craig, ‘God can have [omnipotence, etc.] if God is a soul possessing the rational faculties sufficient for personhood’. The natural sense of these words implies one of two things: (i) if something ‘is a soul possessing the rational faculties sufficient for personhood’, then *it* is a person, or (ii) if something ‘is a soul possessing the rational faculties sufficient for personhood’, then *those (sets of) rational faculties* are persons. If (i) is true, there are four persons (the three Persons and God)—which is one too many persons for orthodoxy. If (ii) is true, it does not follow that God has omnipotence, etc.; rather, it follows that God possesses three distinct (sets of) rational faculties each of which is omnipotent, etc.—in which case there two too many Gods for orthodoxy.

4. *There is no numerical sameness without identity: Leftow*

According to Leftow, there is exactly one divine individual substance, God, and there is exactly one way to be divine, namely, by instantiating the divine nature; nothing but God instantiates it (2004: 304). However, God generates three discrete ‘streams’ of mental events. For each stream, its occurrence ‘constitutes in existence’ a distinct ‘substance’, specifically ‘a person’, ‘a subject of mental states’. These are the Persons, ‘particular things made to exist by’ the occurrence of the three streams (2007: 367, 373-374). Furthermore, events that occur in the stream of events that constitute the existence of the Father—call it ‘the Father’s stream’—‘cause to exist’ the stream of events that constitute the existence of the Son—call it ‘the Son’s stream’—and events that occur in the Father’s stream and the Son’s stream jointly ‘cause to exist’ the stream of events that constitute the existence of the Spirit—call it ‘the Spirit’s stream’. These causal relations ‘are what make them all streams within one individual’s life,’ namely God’s (2004: 314; 2010: 442). But no stream succeeds the other

temporally and each is eternal, necessary, and intrinsic to God's life. As a result, and necessarily, 'God always lives his life in three discrete strands at once' (2004: 199, 312). Indeed, 'the Persons *just are* God' (2004: 184; 2012b: 334); 'the Father is God living just one life', 'God living as Father' (2010: 445, 442), God in the 'phase' of 'his life as Father' (2004: 323-324; 2012a: 319); likewise for the Son and the Spirit. God 'never exists save *in* the Persons.... There is just one God who generates and lives as the three Persons, by generating and living in three distinct mental streams' (2007: 374).

If Leftow's model is correct, then the Father is identical with the Son, and something is true of the Father if and only if it is true of the Son—both of which the Athanasian Creed seems to deny (Rea 2009; Hasker 2012). Leftow accepts this consequence, provided that 'the Father' rigidly designates 'the God who in some [stream] has the properties that suffice for being the Father' and 'the Son' rigidly designates 'the God who in some [stream] has the properties that suffice for being the Son' (2012b: 335). Roughly, a term rigidly designates something if it refers to it in every possible situation in which it exists and never anything else. Thus, for example, 'Hesperus' refers to the thing so named and not something else no matter the place or time or possible situation in which it exists; and the same goes for 'Phosphorous'. Since 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorous' rigidly designate exactly the same thing, the planet Venus, Hesperus is identical with Phosphorous and something is true of Hesperus if and only if it is true of Phosphorous. According to Leftow, the same thing holds for the Father and the Son, if 'the Father' and 'the Son' rigidly designate exactly the same thing: God. Nevertheless, says Leftow, his model 'is not heretical' since the Father and the Son 'remain [as] distinct' as 'dancers counted by roles remain distinct even if the same woman dances both roles'.

However, if exactly one woman dances two roles, then no matter when or where or in what possible situation she dances them and no matter how she appears while dancing them, she is just one dancer. Leftow tries to reassure the Trinitarian: 'On my view, the difference between the Persons...is like that between myself at twenty, myself at thirty, and myself at forty' (2012a: 319). The problem with this is that if the referring expressions 'myself at twenty', etc. are rigid designators, then that is no difference at all.

But what if 'the Father' and 'the Son' are *non-rigid* designators? In that case, says Leftow, our second formulation of the logical problem is *invalid*. For if they are non-rigid designators, then 'God's eternal identities with the Persons...obtain only in certain parts of His life, and.... at no point in God's life at which He is one Person is He any other Person' (2007: 374-375; 2004: 324-26). Roughly, a term non-rigidly designates something if it actually refers to it, but it does not refer to it always or everywhere or in every possible situation in which it exists. Thus, for example, 'the evening star' actually refers to Venus and so, in the actual situation, the evening star is identical with Venus. But something other than Venus might have appeared first in the evening sky, in which case 'the evening star' would have referred to it and not to Venus. In that non-actual situation, the evening star is not identical with Venus. Venus is identical with the evening star only in those situations in which Venus satisfies the description 'the evening star', i.e. only so long as Venus appears first in the evening sky. Likewise, says Leftow, if 'the Father' is a non-rigid designator, then God is identical with the Father only at a certain part of his life, namely that part where God satisfies the description 'the Father', i.e. only at the Father's stream. Thus, the truth that 'the Father is identical with God' expresses is better expressed as '*at the Father's stream*, the Father is identical with God'. Likewise, the truth that 'the Son is identical with God' expresses is better expressed as '*at the Son's stream*, the Son is identical with God'. But it does not follow from these two claims that 'at a single stream, the Father is identical with

God and the Son is identical with God'. Therefore, on Leftow's model, it is false that (2.3) if the Father is God and the Son is God, then the Father is the Son. More generally, the upshot is that if we 'index Trinitarian truths to appropriate sets of events [the different streams], then [we can] use this indexing to block the move' from 'the Father is identical with God and the Son is identical with God' to 'the Father is identical with the Son' (2004: 326)—*provided that* 'the Father' and 'the Son' are non-rigid designators.

On the non-rigid version of his model, Leftow assesses each formulation of the logical problem of the Trinity in two stages, first converting the unindexed Trinitarian premises and conclusion into indexed ones, and then showing how at least one of the indexed premises is false or the indexed conclusion does not follow. We have just seen how this strategy is deployed with the second formulation. As for the first formulation, it is false that (1.2) if the Father is the same God as the Son, then the Father is a God, the Son is a God, and the Father is identical with the Son. That's because, on Leftow's model, when the Creed says that the Father is the same God as the Son, that implies only that at the Father's stream, the Father is a God and, at the Son's stream, the Son is a God. It does not follow that at a single stream the Father is identical with the Son. As for the third formulation, it is false that (3.5) if the Father is not the Son and each is a God, then there are at least two Gods. For although at no stream is the Father identical with the Son, and at the Father's stream, the Father is a God, and at the Son's stream, the Son is a God, it does not follow that, at a single stream, there are at least two Gods. Instead, what follows is that at each stream, there is only one God, namely the God which is identical with the person at that stream.

The critic will raise at least two concerns. First, Leftow has introduced a new operator, 'at the stream of x', but he offers no logic for its use. Thus, we can't be sure that his use of it solves the problems for which it was introduced. Second, each argument Leftow aims to refute consists in an *inter-stream* inference, an inference from at least one premise about what's true at some stream to a conclusion about what's true at some other stream. But even if inter-stream inferences can be blocked via the 'at the stream of x' operator, *intra-stream* inferences cannot. For example, since Leibniz's Law is necessarily true, it is true at every stream; moreover, at the Father's stream, the Father is identical with God. Thus, at the Father's stream, something is true of the Father if and only if it is true of God. But on Leftow's model, at the Father's stream, something 'causes to exist' those events that constitute the existence of the Father. It follows that, at the Father's stream, something 'causes to exist' those events that constitute the existence of *God*. But there can be no such thing. For if there were, either it would be identical with God or it would not, in which case either God caused himself to exist or something else caused God to exist—both of which are impossible.

5. *There is numerical sameness without identity: Brower and Rea*

According to Brower and Rea (BR), we can dispel the mystery surrounding the Trinity if we attend to their solution to the problem of material constitution. Imagine 'an artistic building contractor who fashions a marble statue that is to be used as a pillar in the building he is constructing' (2009: 418). On the one hand, it seems that the pillar could exist without the statue and vice-versa, and so the pillar is *not* the same as the statue; on the other hand, it seems that there could not be two material objects entirely located in exactly the same region, and so the pillar *is* the same as the statue. To avoid the contradiction, BR do two things. First, they distinguish two species of numerical sameness: (i) sameness *with* identity, that is, identity, and (ii) sameness *without* identity (2009: 266-69, 279). Second, they say that the statue is numerically the same as, but not identical with, the pillar. By way of explanation,

BR appeal to the Aristotelian idea of a hylomorphic compound, according to which all familiar objects are matter-form compounds, where matter is undifferentiated stuff and a form is an organizational property. For example, the pillar is a compound of the form *being a pillar* instantiated by some matter at a particular region while the statue is a compound of the property of *being a statue* instantiated by the same matter in the same region (2009: 267). However, in their case, although the pillar is *not* identical with the statue because they have different properties, the pillar *is* the same material object as the statue because they share the same matter. And so the number of *material objects* in the region they occupy is one, even though the number of *objects* or *hylomorphic compounds* in that region is two.

BR claim that hylomorphism, so understood, provides ‘an illuminating account of inter-Trinitarian relations’ (2005: 155). In fact, it is so illuminating, they say, that ‘the problem of the Trinity disappears’ (2009: 277). For, although the Persons cannot be *hylomorphic* compounds since they are not *material*, they can be compounds of distinct forms—‘Person-defining properties’ like *Fatherhood*, *Sonship*, and *Processing*—and something that ‘plays the role of matter’. BR identify that something as ‘immaterial stuff’ (2009: 276). Just as the pillar is distinct from the statue but, because they share the same matter, the pillar is the same material object as the statue, so the Father is distinct from the Son but, because they share the same immaterial stuff, the Father is the same God as the Son.

On BR’s model, it is false that (1.2) if the Father is the same God as the Son, then the Father is a God, the Son is a God, and the Father is identical with the Son. For if the Father is the same God as the Son, then the Father is a God, the Son is a God, and the Father is numerically the same *without identity* as the Son. Moreover, on BR’s model, it is false that (2.3) if the Father is God and the Son is God, then the Father is the Son. That’s because, although it is true that the Father is identical with God and it is true that the Son is identical with God, it does not follow that the Father is identical with the Son. By way of explanation, BR say that ‘God’ can refer to each of the Persons. So the only truth expressed by ‘the Father is identical with God’ is the proposition that the Father is identical with the Father, and the only truth expressed by ‘the Son is identical with God’ is the proposition that the Son is identical with the Son. It does not follow from these two propositions that the Father is identical with the Son. Furthermore, on BR’s model, it is false that (3.5) if the Father is not the Son and each is a God, there are at least two Gods. For although the Father is distinct from the Son and both are a God, they share the same immaterial stuff, and so each is the same God (without identity) as the other; thus, there is only one God.

The most common response to Trinitarian models according to which there is numerical sameness without identity is to deny that there is any such thing (see Geach 1967 and 1977, Hawthorne 2003 and Hughes 2009, Martinich 1978 and 1979, Noonan 1997). In the present section, and in the section to follow, we focus on other objections.

The critic will point out that, to resolve the logical problems of the Trinity, BR’s model must ensure that the Father is the same *God* as the Son, and it does not. Instead, BR’s model ensures only that the Father is the same *immaterial object* as the Son. To see why, recall that the pillar is the same *material object* as the statue because they share the same matter. The same goes for the Father and the Son: the Father is the same *immaterial object* as the Son because they share the same immaterial stuff. Sharing of the same matter is what places pillar and statue in the *is the same material object as* relation. Likewise, sharing the same immaterial stuff places the Father and the Son in the *is the same immaterial object as*

relation. But sharing that stuff doesn't place them in the *is the same God as* relation. Anything divine appears conspicuously absent from BR's model.

BR do not stick with immaterial stuff as what plays the role of matter. They move to something they label 'the divine essence' and 'the divine nature', and they postulate that the Father is a compound resulting from *it* instantiating Fatherhood, and similarly for the Son and Sonship and the Holy Spirit and Processing. But what, exactly, is this 'divine nature' of which BR speak, such that by virtue of its instantiating these person-defining properties, something divine results? Rea answers that it is a non-compound substance, but he remains neutral on questions about its inclusion in various ontological categories e.g., abstract v. concrete, particular v. universal, etc. (Rea 2009: 420). Unfortunately, this doesn't address the critic's question. For just as immaterial stuff is insufficient for divinity, so is being a non-compound substance.

Elsewhere, Rea identifies natures with 'fundamental powers', by which he means properties with three characteristics: they 'are not reducible to other properties', they are natural not in the sense that contrasts with 'supernatural' but rather in the sense of 'marking objective similarities and joints in nature', and they 'ground non-natural powers or, if there are no such things,...explain the truth of (putative) non-natural power-attributions' (Rea 2011: 139). If that is what natures are, then all that we know about the divine nature is this: it is an irreducible natural property that explains why ascriptions of omnipotence, etc. are true. Just so we have a name for this property—without begging any questions—call it *being whatever-it-is* (following Rea 2009: 419).

In that case, BR's model comes to this: (i) the irreducible natural property of being whatever-it-is plays the role of matter, (ii) that irreducible natural property instantiates three other properties—Fatherhood, etc.—each of which plays the role of form, and (iii) as a result, there are three hylomorphic compounds—the Persons—each of which is omnipotent, etc., even though (iv) there is only one God. And why not three Gods? '[B]ecause immaterial things are [counted] by their nature, and [the Persons] share the same nature'—that is, 'share the same nature' in the sense that the property of being whatever-it-is is a constituent of each of them (Rea 2011: 148).

The critic will express several concerns about this expanded model. First, if immaterial things are counted by their natures, then, just as the Persons are distinct hylomorphic compounds but the same God, so Michael, Gabriel, and Helel are distinct hylomorphic compounds but the same angel, and so Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, and Dean Zimmerman are distinct hylomorphic compounds but the same immaterial human soul, and so on for other sorts of immaterial things (Rea 2011: 147n21). Second, the critic asked: 'what, exactly, is this 'divine nature' of which BR speak, such that by virtue of its instantiating these person-defining properties, something divine results?' The present answer is that it is the irreducible natural property of being whatever-it-is. Several objections arise. (i) Being whatever-it-is does not explain why ascriptions of omnipotence, etc. are true of it. Of course, we could give it another name, e.g., *being such that nothing greater can be conceived*; but that would be misleading since that property is reducible to others, as are other candidates. (ii) Although the property of being whatever-it-is instantiates Fatherhood, etc., what instantiates *it*? The model is silent. But unless something instantiates it, it cannot explain why ascriptions of omnipotence, etc. are true. (iii) On the model, an uninstantiated property—being whatever-it-is—instantiates three other properties—Fatherhood, etc.—and the result is three persons. But an uninstantiated property instantiating another property

cannot result in a ‘concrete particular non-property’, much less a person. Third, Rea tells us that ‘[e]ven a child can grasp the idea of imposing a form upon a piece of clay’ (2011: 138). Maybe he is right, but can any adult grasp the idea proposed by BR’s model? Even if we can grasp some parts of it, is it really ‘an illuminating account of inter-Trinitarian relations’ at all, never mind whether it is so illuminating that ‘the problem of the Trinity disappears’?

6. *There is numerical sameness without identity: van Inwagen*

According to van Inwagen’s model, ‘there is no one all-encompassing relation of identity’; that is, ‘there is no relation that is both universally reflexive and forces indiscernibility’ (2003: 92). Nothing answers to phrases of the form ‘x is the same *simpliciter* as y’, ‘x is numerically identical with y’, ‘x is identical with y’, ‘x is absolutely identical with y’ or ‘x = y’ (2003: 92-93). Rather, there are indefinitely many ‘relations of relative identity’ expressed by phrases of the form ‘is the same N as’, where N takes count nouns as instances, e.g. ‘is the same horse as’. Relative identity relations are neither universally reflexive nor force indiscernibility. They are not universally reflexive because, if they were, then it would be true that Obama is the same donkey as Obama; but Obama is not the same donkey as *anything* (2003: 93). If relative identity relations forced indiscernibility, then anything that we could say by using ‘x is the same N as y’ we could just as well say by using ‘x is an N, y is an N, and x is identical with y’. Even so, on the model, some relative identity relations may force indiscernibility, e.g. ‘is the same donkey as’. But in any such case no feature of all relative identity relations forces indiscernibility. Rather, for example, the features of *donkey*-identity do.

Van Inwagen constructs a logic of relative identities and uses it to demonstrate that the problematic Trinitarian propositions are consistent. Its vocabulary is that of first-order predicate logic, without ‘=’, the description operator, and singular terms. Singular terms are absent, says van Inwagen, because the concept of a singular term involves the notion of identity: if singular term *a* denotes *x* and also denotes *y*, it follows that *x* is identical with *y*. As a substitute for singular reference, an adaptation of Russell’s Theory of Descriptions can be used (1988: 259-260; 2003: 94-95). For example, ‘The present pope is bald’ could be read as ‘There is an *x* such that [*x* is at present a pope, and, for any *y* (if *y* is at present a pope, then *y* is the same man as *x*), and *x* is bald].’ The predicates of the vocabulary are partitioned into two classes, somehow visibly differentiated, the ‘ordinary’ ones and the ‘relative identity’ ones. The rules of inference are those of predicate logic, plus two rules that state, in effect, that relative identity predicates express symmetrical and transitive relations. Reflexivity and Leibniz’s Law are absent for reasons stated above.

The worrisome Trinitarian propositions can be represented using two undefined relative identity predicates, ‘x is the same being as y’ and ‘x is the same person as y’, a predicate that expresses the divine nature, e.g. ‘x is divine’, and three predicates that individuate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, e.g. ‘x begets’, ‘x is begotten’, and ‘x proceeds’, respectively. Thus, to illustrate: ‘the Father is divine’ can be read as ‘There is an *x* such that [*x* begets, and for any *y*, (if *y* begets, then *y* is the same person as *x*), and *x* is divine]’. Sentences of the form illustrated by ‘God is just’ can be read as ‘There is an *x* such that [*x* is divine, and for any *y* (*y* is the same being as *x*), and *x* is just]’. Van Inwagen’s model assumes that (i) anything divine is a person, (ii) any person is a being, (iii) something is a divine person if and only if it is a divine being, and (iv) for any *x* and *y*, if *x* is the same being as *y*, then, *x* is divine if and only if *y* is divine (1988: 262-263). With these materials in hand, it can be shown that no contradiction follows from these three Trinitarian claims: there exists exactly

one God, there exist exactly three divine persons, and there exist three divine persons in one divine being. Moreover, given some further orthodox assumptions about how the predicates that individuate the Persons are related to each other and to personhood, being, and divinity, it can be shown that the inference from ‘the Father is the same person as God and God is the same person as the Son’ to ‘the Father is the same person as the Son’ is invalid, even though ‘is the same person as’ is transitive (1988: 266-268; 2003: 96-97).

If van Inwagen’s model is correct, then each of the formulations of the logical problem of the Trinity has at least one false premise. That is because each formulation has at least one premise that presupposes the existence of absolute identity. Moreover, if the premises are reformulated in a way that is permitted by van Inwagen’s model, no contradiction can be derived from them.

The critic is apt to raise at least three concerns about van Inwagen’s model. First, rejecting identity and singular reference is too high a price to pay for Trinitarian consistency—especially since the logic of relative identities has no known application elsewhere, a point that van Inwagen concedes (1988: 258-59). Second, the doctrine of relative identity presupposes an antirealist metaphysics according to which ‘there is *no* theory-independent fact about *what* there is or about how many things there are’; but ‘orthodoxy will not permit us to say that the very existence of [the Persons] is a *theory-dependent* matter’ (Rea 2003: 443). Third, absent any metaphysical story that allows us to understand the relative identity relations among the Persons, we have no idea what is being said when, on the model, we read things of the form (i) for some x and y —where x and y are each a person and a being— x is the same being as y , but not the same person as y , (ii) for some x , y , and z —where x , y , and z is each a person— x is the same person as y , y is the same person as z , but x is not the same person as z , and (iii) for some x and y —where x and y are each a person and an N — x is not the same person as y but there exists exactly one N . Instances of these forms have no ‘graspable content’ (Swinburne 1994: 188n23), they are so much ‘mumbo-jumbo’ (Tuggy 2003: 175-178). In short, on van Inwagen’s model, the doctrine of the Trinity is unintelligible.

As for the first concern, the critic is right: the cost of Trinitarianism is far too high if one must reject identity and singular reference to purchase it, *provided that Trinitarianism is false*. But if it is true and if it is inconsistent with identity and singular reference (van Inwagen 2003: 84-92), the price is fair.

As for the second concern, two objections may be distinguished. According to the first, the logic of relative identities presupposes that ‘there is *no* theory-independent fact about what there is’, and so, on the model, ‘the very existence of [the Persons] is a *theory-dependent* matter’. But, van Inwagen might well reply that, on the model, there are divine beings and there are divine persons and the existence of neither depends on us or our theorizing about them. If we had never existed or if we had never engaged in Trinitarian theorizing, the propositions expressed by the translations of Trinitarian sentences into the logic of relative identities would still be true. According to the second objection, like relative identity more generally, the model presupposes that ‘there is *no* theory-independent fact about...how many things there are’. But van Inwagen might well reply that no Christian authority requires that Christians believe that something of the form ‘there are exactly n things’ expresses a truth. Moreover, to suppose there is a truth of that form is just to suppose that identity and singular reference exist—hardly an objection to a view that denies both. Furthermore, it’s not as though we are left without any way to count. Of course, on the model, we can’t count by

identity since it doesn't exist. Nevertheless, in general, if there are Ns and Ms, then there is such a thing as how many Ns and Ms there are counting by N and there is such a thing as how many Ns and Ms there are counting by M. Thus, if there are divine beings and divine persons, there is such a thing as how many there are: '[c]ounting divine Beings by beings, there is one; counting divine Persons by beings, there is one; counting divine Beings by persons, there are three; counting divine Persons by persons, there are three' (1988: 265). Finally, there is nothing 'theory-dependent' about any of this, as though how many divine beings and divine persons there are required our existence or theorizing.

As for the third concern about unintelligibility, van Inwagen might reply:

It may be that it is important for us to know that God is (somehow) three Persons in one Being and not at all important for us to have any inkling of how this could be.... It may be that we *cannot* understand how God can be three Persons in one Being. It may be that an intellectual grasp of the Trinity is forever beyond us. And why not, really? It is not terribly daring to suppose that reality may contain things whose natures we cannot understand. And if there were such natures, it would not be so very surprising if the highest nature of all were among them. (1988: 243).

The critic will find this unsatisfactory, however. For the worry about unintelligibility is *not* that we can know *that* God is three persons but have no inkling of *how* it could be. Treating the worry that way presupposes that there is a proposition expressed by 'God is three persons' that can be believed. Rather, the worry is that, on the model there is no proposition expressed by that or other Trinitarian sentences. Against the model Swinburne writes:

Since belief in the Trinity is commended to Christians by the Church, the Church must be purporting to teach the doctrine as one of which there is some graspable content; and if a certain form of that doctrine has the consequence that there cannot be [any graspable content], the Church cannot coherently commend that form for belief, for there is nothing which belief in it would consist. (1994: 188n23)

At least three replies are open to van Inwagen. First, on his model, the translations of Trinitarian sentences into the logic of relative identities have implications we can understand; thus, they have at least some graspable content. Second, on the model, there is a metaphysical story in virtue of which the results of translating Trinitarian statements into the logic of relative identities come out true, although that story is beyond our ken. But whatever it is, it is (a) inconsistent with the translations of Trinitarian statements into the logic of identity and (b) consistent with their translation into the logic of relative identities. This logical contrast provides more graspable content. Third, 'God is *somehow* three persons' has enough graspable content to be something which belief in it would consist. But in that case, so does 'Something x begets and whatever begets is the same person as x and x is divine; and something y is begotten and whatever is begotten is the same person as y and y is divine; and x is *somehow* the same being but not the same person as y'. And the same goes for other translations of Trinitarian statements into the logic of relative identities, where the relative identity predicates are modified with 'somehow'. Explicitly unspecific propositions can be objects of belief.

These five models attempt to model consistently the doctrine of the Trinity while retaining orthodoxy and rebutting various formulations of the logical problem of the Trinity. There are other models that aim to do the same thing (see Hughes 2009, Hasker 2013, and the

bibliographies at Tuggy 2009). One model deserves special mention: the attempt to use the logic of plural reference, quantification, and predication to understand the doctrine of the Trinity (see Bohn 2011, Kleinschmidt 2012, and Linnebo 2013).

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